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by Dilip Kumar Roy

AMONG THE GREAT

Conversations with

SRI AUROBINDO

MAHATMA GANDHI

BINDRA[illegible]H TAGORE

ROMAIN ROLLAND

BERTRAND RUSSELL

With an introduction by

SIR S. RADHAKRISHNAN

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AMONG THE GREAT

BY

DILIP KUMAR ROY

JAICO PUBLISHING HOUSE
BOMBAY NEW YORK CALCUTTA

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AMONG THE GREAT ran into two editions in the higher priced edition, first published by Nalanda Publications, Bombay. This edition is completely revised and enlarged.

Jaico Book edition published November, 1950
1st printing .... October, 1950

Printed in the U.S.A.

JAICO PUBLISHING HOUSE

125 BELL LANE
MAHATMA GANDHI ROAD
BOMBAY

44-45 EZRA STREET
CALCUTTA

9/15

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PREFACE

I WAS thirteen then, in 1910, when I came upon Sri Ramkrishna Kathamrita (talks of Sri Ramkrishna Deva) translated subsequently by Swami Nikhilananda under the title, "Gospel of Sri Ramkrishna." I was indeed fascinated even though I was somewhat sceptical about its authenticity. A cousin of mine contended that it was a faithful record of the Sage's sayings because Sri Mahendranath Gupta, the chronicler, had kept a meticulous record in his diary of all that he used to hear from day to day, and that his memory was wonderfully reliable. I decided to verify, the more as Sri Mahendranath happened to be almost a neighbour of ours.

So I called on him. I was instantly charmed by his beautiful face: fair, tender and shy, with starry eyes and a rich white beard. He looked almost like a saint and had the voice of one. He asked me kindly who I was. I told him. "Oh, you are D. L. Roy's son?" he exclaimed in delight. "Blessed—blessed boy, to have such a noble father! Come, sit down near me here, close to me." He caressed my face gently with his hands as I made him my obeisance and appraised me with an affectionate scrutiny. "Now tell me, my boy," he said patting me on my shoulder, "what has made you call on me?"

I blushed and answered shyly: "I have come, sir, to hear about Thakur Ramkrishna and see your diary if you will be so kind as to allow me."

He flushed with pleasure and shouted: "Prabhash! Prabhash! Just come, run! Look, this little boy has come to hear from me about *Thakur*, fancy that!" Then turning to me: "Look, how my hair has stood on end!" And I looked in amazement: his body was indeed quivering with ecstasy and every single hair on his hand had stood on end! Also his eyes glistened with unshed tears. I was dumbfounded. "What Gurubhakti!" I said to myself. "Shall I be able to have such a devotion to my Guru when he will appear before me?" "Not likely," came the instant answer from within, "devotees are born and not made and, besides, you are too sceptical by nature to be able to let faith in, not to mention *bhakti*." And I mused on the verge of tears till he called me back from my reverie by placing on my lap, gently and reverently, his treasured diaries, bound in morocco, wherein lay recorded, for all times, the jewelled sayings of one who revolutionized the lives of millions all the world over.

(Years later, Aldous Huxley wrote in his Foreword to the Gospel of Sri Ramkrishna: " 'M' as the author modestly styles himself, was peculiarly qualified for the task. To a reverent love of his master, to a deep and experiential knowledge of that master's teaching, he added a prodigious memory for the small happenings of each day and a happy gift for recording them in an interesting and realistic way. Making good use of his natural gifts and of the circumstances in which he found himself, 'M' produced a book unique, so far as my knowledge goes, in the literature of hagiography. . . . To read through these conversations . . . where discussions of the oddest aspects of the Hindu mythology give place to the most profound and subtle utterance about the nature of Ultimate Reality, is in itself a liberal education in humility, tolerance and suspense of judgment.")

I made my obeisance again to this greatest biographer the world has ever seen. "But before you go," he said suddenly, "I would like to make you one request."

"Request!" I stared at him in blank amazement.

"You are born blessed in having such a great father," he went on. "Promise me you'll keep a record of his sayings, will you?" I nodded mechanically as he added: "And not only your father's," he amended, "but try, whenever you meet a great man, to put on paper any memorable words that may fall from his lips."

I do not know what impelled him to make such a strange request—to a mere schoolboy. Can it be that a hero-worshipper knows a hero-worshipper when he sees one? Or maybe he felt something!—I cannot tell. All I can say is that I have never been able to forget my promise to him. This is the genesis of my present book.

I must acknowledge one more debt; to my dear friend, Asit Kumar Gupta, whose remarkable flair for style and the *mots justes* I have profited by in this edition while he read through the proofs with me.

Dilip Kumar Roy

New Year, 1950
Sri Aurobindo Ashram
Pondicherry
India

INTRODUCTION

SRI DILIP KUMAR ROY of the Aurobindo Asram, Pondicherry, has brought together in this book the records of his conversations and correspondence with some of our great contemporaries, Romain Rolland, the artist, Gandhi, the saint, Bertrand Russell, the thinker, Rabindranath Tagore, the poet and Sri Aurobindo, the seer. The author, Sri Dilip Kumar Roy is the *tirthankar*, the pilgrim in quest of truth, the seeker of wisdom and he calls his book *Among the Great*.

What is greatness? There does not seem to be any measurable quality of it and yet we recognise it when we meet it. The high minds and brave hearts that press onward to their goal, never doubting, never yielding, have the quality of greatness in them. Rabindranath Tagore says: "In every land of every clime, a few men have crystallised into a nucleus of light, men who have made bold to proclaim, that, though isolated, they fear none. You may deride them, persecute them, even kill them, but never will they return blow for blow. For they are pledged in everlasting loyalty and love, to the voice of the Lord seated in the Heart."

The choice spirits whose considered convictions on many matters of vital interest and urgency are set forth in this volume, are men of deep humility and profound insight, who are released from sectional views and have won through to illimitable horizons. They have wrestled with the central problems of life and reached decisive certainties. No one with a spark of spirit in him can help raising those central questions of life and thought which have engaged the attention of the great thinkers of the past. Who am I? From what causes do I derive my existence and to what conditions do I return? What beings surround me and what is my relation to them? Kant stated the chief problems in the form of three questions. What can I know? What ought I to do? What may I hope for? The five outstanding personalities have pondered over these last uncertainties and after much toil and tribulation arrived at comprehensive views which rescue them from the strife of competing half-truths and the weariness of unrelated knowledge. A world troubled almost to despair by the tragedy of recurrent wars makes them burn with rage against the lack of contact between the principles of the religion we profess and the social action that should accompany it.

I

The opening chapter brings back to us memories of Romain Rolland's recent death and his courageous allegiance to universal values which meant so much to so many in the war years. He tried to see the world and its tragedies with a timeless vision. He made his mark first in 1903 with his life of Beethoven, "the most heroic force in modern art, the best friend of all those who suffer and struggle." This book attracted the attention of a much wider public than that of students specialising in music. Romain Rolland loved music not only as an art but as a *sadhana* which is victorious over time and its frontiers. He started in 1904 the publication of his famous *Jean Christophe,* who was himself a musician and a sufferer and the last volume of this great work appeared twelve months before the 1914 war. In spite of the war, Romain Rolland kept his faith in the victory of spirit and the greatness of man. He could have said of himself what he made *Jean Christophe* say, in the words of Antigone, "I was made for love and not for hate." Through his works, we realise that the spirit of man is the same everywhere whether in the East or in the West. "There is neither East nor West for the naked soul; such things are merely its trappings. The whole world is its home. And as its home is in each one of us, it belongs to all of us." It is no wonder that he was attracted by the ancient wisdom of India as illustrated by Ramkrishna, Vivekananda, Tagore, and Gandhi, "Oh Tagore, Oh Gandhi, rivers of India, who, like the Indus and the Ganges, encircle in your double embrace the east and the west—the latter, Mahatma, master of self-sacrifice and of heroic action—the former, a vast dream of light—both issuing from God Himself, on this world tilled by the ploughshare of Hate." He longed to come to India though the visit never came off. In a letter he wrote to Tagore, dated 11th June, 1923, he said "Dear Friend, how much I would like to come and see you in India? All the movements of my mind tend towards that direction. I fear I shall not be able to carry out this plan this winter. But I hope for voyage to Asia and a stay at Santiniketan. I have so much to learn from you! And I believe that I shall have there a mission to fulfil, a predetermined duty till the end of my life. The union of Europe and Asia must be, in the centuries to come, the most noble task of mankind. As for myself, India from now on is not a foreign land, she is the greatest of all countries, the ancient country from which once I came. I find her again deep inside me."* Romain Rolland was an apostle of reconciliation. "Let us endeavour to bring together once again the great Indo-European family which has been so criminally sundered by space." No great work is ever accomplished in this world save by those who have faith in mankind, faith in something higher and greater than mankind, which is yet present to mankind. Romain Rolland bore witness to this faith in all his work.

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* Quoted in an article in *The Hindustan* of January-March 1945, entitled "Romain Rolland: The Greatest European since Tolstoy" by K. R. Kripalani, p. 4.

II

If "the greatest artist is he who lives the finest life," † then Gandhi has a claim to that title. "What is art but beauty in simplicity and what is asceticism but the highest manifestation of simple beauty in daily life, shorn of artificialities and make believes?" Gandhi's life is at once art and asceticism. He believes all that he professes and practises all that he enjoins.

There is an individual other-worldliness that is a dedication; but if it becomes an other-worldliness which turns its back on society, it is the abdication of Religion. If those who spend their strength in the attempt to pull down the mighty from their seats and exalt the humble have no faith in the unseen reality, the believers should abase themselves in the dust for they have left to others the task that is rightly theirs. Our politicians are deficient in the spirit of religion and our religious men are deficient in social enthusiasm. Religion should be the relentless enemy of oppression, aggression and injustice. When it condones any of these things, when it compromises with power and prestige, when it patches up peace with the forces of evil, it becomes poor, unreal and nerveless. Religion is revolutionary or it is nothing. Gandhi has brought the spirit of religion into the affairs of politics. For him, war is the greatest crime, a view which is shared by all sincere religious men. Speaking of war, the *Message* issued by the Conference of the Non-Roman Churches at Oxford in July 1937 says: "The Universal Church, surveying the nations of the world, in every one of which it is now planted and rooted must pronounce a condemnation of war, unqualified and unrestricted. War can occur only as fruit and manifestation of sin." *

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† p. 86.

Gandhi applies the technique of redemptive suffering for the removal of injustice and exploitation. While he is essentially a servant of humanity, he works for humanity from the platform of India. We need not cut down the tree to gather the fruit. In order to perfect human society, it is not necessary for us to destroy the family or the nation. We have to transform them by developing them in the right direction, by stifling the selfishness which corrupts them at the source. Patriotism is not a vice to be eradicated but a force to be employed in the service of world community. When Gandhi fights for the freedom of India, he does so in no narrow spirit. Freedom for him is not merely the acquisition of political power, but is the advance into a new life, when all things will undergo transformation and all forms of human oppression will cease. This will mean a new education, a new discipline, a devotion to God and a selfless service of men.

III

Sri Dilip Roy's account of Bertrand Russell shows that it is not necessary to agree with a person in order to admire him. Sri Dilip Roy is of the view that the higher human values, the aesthetic sense, the moral consciousness and the religious intuition cannot be explained in terms of material, mechanical or naturalistic evolution and so thinks that the scientific humanism of Russell which endeavours to explain these values in terms of naturalistic evolution is not more satisfactory as a metaphysical creed than the cruder materialisms. If a desire

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* The Churches Survey Their Task p. 59.

to worship and a faith in a sustaining presence are the marks of religion, Bertrand Russell cannot be said to have felt the spirit of religion. Yet his profound humanity, his hatred of shams and hypocrisy, his advocacy of oppressed nations and people, have given him a strong hold on young people's affection and imagination. "We need a morality based upon love of life, upon pleasure in growth and positive achievement. . . . A man should be regarded as 'good' if he is happy, expansive, generous and glad when others are happy . . . A man who acquires a fortune by cruelty or exploitation should be regarded as at present we regard what is called an 'immoral' man and he should be so regarded even if he goes to Church regularly." Russell wishes to keep his "mental sky clear of mystic clouds" and yet has a "mystic tenderness" for suffering humanity. He has no patience with muddled thinking, with stupid taboos and superstitions. In a celebrated essay on *A Free Man's Worship* which he contributed to the *Independent Review* in 1903, he gives us the philosophy of a disillusioned intellectual. He included it later in his volume on *Mysticism and Logic* with the comment that its general attitude to life still seems to its author, in the main, the one which must be adopted by those who have no dogmatic religious beliefs, if inward defeat was to be avoided. In memorable words, Bertrand Russell tells us:

> "The life of Man is a long march through the night, surrounded by invisible forces, tortured by weariness and pain, towards a goal that few can hope to reach, and where none may tarry long. One by one, as they march, our comrades vanish from our sight seized by the silent orders of omnipotent Death. Very brief is the time in which we can help them, in which their happiness or misery is decided."

He impresses on us the transience of earthly things without any compensating vision of a treasure in heaven. He, however, exhorts us to be good and compassionate.

> "Be it ours to shed sunshine on their path, to lighten their sorrows by the balm of sympathy, to give them the pure joy of a never-tiring affection . . . to instil faith in hours of despair."

Russell does not seem to realise that the human individual who can sit in judgment on the universe, who has the intelligence to know that his life is but a brief episode in the history of this planet, who has developed a conscience which protests against the waste and want of the world, is not a mere phenomenon among phenomena, an object among objects. If he were only that, how could he have faith in his hours of despair? Russell's humanism may prepare us to die with dignity but does it inspire us to live with hope? When Russell asks us to "shed sunshine on the path of our comrades, to lighten their sorrows by the balm of sympathy, to give them the pure joy of a never tiring affection, to instil faith in hours of despair," he encourages us to think that we can do much for the improvement of the human race, and that some sound instinct urges it. Let us help it, let us work with it. There is a realisation of God which we can achieve through saving the future of humanity on this planet, a realisation to which humanity aspires.

IV

Rabindranath Tagore was the greatest figure of the Indian Renaissance who shed a glow of illumination on the age in which he lived, one of those rare men about whom it may be said without any exaggeration that neither his own generation nor another will look on his like again. He was essentially a poet and so sought for fulfilment, not in escape but in activity. He lived and worked for freeing the mind of man. He wished to arouse mankind to a constant vigilance against the insanities, injustices and confusions which, in one form or another, threaten human society from within. While he fought against the exploitation of India by others, he fought equally against the inward slavery of the Indian mind. If we are to dethrone the despot outside, we must destroy the throne within ourselves which we have built for him. No tyrant can rule the free in mind. Through his *Visvabharati,* Tagore laboured for a world-commonwealth whose foundations rest upon a universal moral law.

V

Sri Aurobindo the seer, claims the wholehearted allegiance of our author. Sri Aurobindo is a great example of the intellectual robustness of mystical souls, whom we approach not so much to partake of their intellectual subtleties as to receive the word of life. The serene elevation of his thought, the vast erudition which he veils with the height of superb art, the witness of his spirit to the life divine, all these qualities are brought out in the extracts reproduced in the fifth chapter.

We are at the beginning of a new era. The chaos, and the confusions caused by the present tangle are in striking contrast to the scientific achievements which have turned distance into nothing, which have enabled us to circle the globe within a week and carry on conversation on the long distance telephone between places as far removed as Calcutta and San Francisco. The miscarriage of the world is the result of the dissociation in the mind of man, in the disrupted consciousness which has pervaded our thought all these centuries. So long as men with distorted vision seize and retain power, the future of humanity will be in peril. The central need of contemporary man is integration, the achievement of harmony within himself which will be reflected in his relations with the world. To usher in the reign of the integrated man is the main purpose of Sri Aurobindo's life and teaching.

The word of God is dynamic and continuous. The Divine spirit overbroods and indwells the soul of humanity as a whole. History records the stages of man's education. The saints and seers of mankind in every age have made articulate the growing word committed to the living soul of man, interpreting to the peoples those truths and principles of which they were themselves aware only as a vague aspiration, or an indefinable discontent.

Sri Dilip Roy's teachers, except Bertrand Russell, believe in a Godhead which is the unmanifested principle of all manifestations and in the capacity of human beings to love, know and become assimilated to the Divine nature. To achieve this contact or communion is the final end and purpose of human existence. All these five teachers hold that humanity does not yet exist, that it is labouring, that its ideal defines itself only progressively. Humanity is in the making and requires to be made. This means a new discipline, a new law or *dharma* which must be followed and the way is profoundly and profusely illustrated in the writings of Sri Aurobindo.

We are greatly indebted to Sri Dilip Kumar Roy for giving us this invaluable book, written with a rare ease and charm and ennobled by a deep moral concern for the good of humanity.

Madras, S. RADHAKRISHNAN
25-4-'45.

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ROMAIN ROLLAND

ROMAIN ROLLAND

I WAS first drawn to Rolland by his epic novel *Jean Christophe* and the musical criticisms and thoughts that played in it as deep under-currents. I longed to meet him, mostly to talk about music and note his reactions to to our music which though melodically rich and versatile is yet deficient in harmony. So I had written to him first from Cambridge introducing myself as an Indian musician studying Western music. He wrote back cordially inviting me to a little Swiss village called Schoeneck where he was then staying. This was in the summer of 1920. I hastened there via Paris and Lausanne and arrived at the lovely rustic hotel in July.

My first impressions were by no means equal to my expectations although I was charmed at once, somewhat inexplicably. For, his appearance was soft and bore no striking feature. With a pale face, liquid green eyes, a frame stooping and frail, a complexion astonishingly sallow, a voice mellow but not deep, he was, in the beginning, rather disappointing. And yet there was something in him that beckoned to you, a magnetism that cast a spell, a charm that grew imperceptibly on you and gave you more than it had promised. And then was there not something like an ascetic aura, a circumambience of mysticism about him? Yes, the more you knew him, the more you found him irresistible.

We talked often about Indian music. On hearing me sing some of our classical Raga-melodies like *Kanara* (corresponding to the Greek Aeolian mode) he was much impressed and prophesied a great future for them in Europe among receptive Europeans. He added that Europe was straining for a new mode of her musical expression and was of opinion that India might, in the next phase, supply just this new inspiration. So he urged me to publish our music in Europe.

I was, however, unconvinced by his optimism. For I did not believe that it would be easy for Europeans however receptive to plumb the hidden depths of our music, being unendowed with our melodic sense, far less the delicate ear for the subtle points of our melodic evolution. So, I argued, our music must always elude and baffle the Western ear, initiated first and last in harmony and counterpoint and choral singing. Our music, I insisted, was a different sphere of delight into which Europe's entry was impossible without the key of an initiation.

Rolland disagreed. In a subsequent letter to me, dated 31st August 1922, he wrote: "I do not share your view that it would be impossible for a man to appreciate Indian music—or, for that matter, any music—unless he, like a professional or a connoisseur, first undertook to study it religiously. I am persuaded that an art is never great but that it appeals to the most ignorant. Certainly, not completely, nor with its supreme appeal. But a great creation in art must contain in its rich granary aliment enough wherewith to satisfy the spiritual hunger of all. Didn't Christ himself say: 'May all eat and drink of it: take, for it is my blood!' And surely Christ did not die for a handful of catechumens. Why would you have a great artist suffer, dream and create for just a few initiates? The illumination of a real song, like the inspired Word, falls where it pleases the Divine. Our role is not to choose our audience: our role is to sing away."

"The beautiful songs which you sang to us," he wrote on, "have proved once again that the gulf between your music and ours is really much less unbridgeable than you so unwarrantedly assume. I for one, have felt nearer in spirit to these forms of art and musical expression than to the music of a Puccini or a Massenet. And I feel that men like you, Tagore, and Coomaraswami are somewhat too prone to exaggerate the abyss which separates your music from ours. You magnify a little too much the difficulty which a European must feel in appraising your art. You judge perhaps of his musical susceptibility from that of the English and the Americans who are two of the least musical races on earth. Their music is all but nonexistent. When, however, you will contact the musically-cultivated of say, France or Germany (to say nothing of Russia), you shall see how responsive they can be to the beauty of your songs.

"It goes without saying, however, that owing to the difference between your musical language and ours, we shall miss a good deal in your music which is of value to you, even as a Frenchman, however enthusiastic he may be for Shakespeare, must miss in him a good deal that is of value to the Englishman. But the profoundly universal essence in your music cannot fail to set any musical soul quivering. Let us endeavour to bring together once again the great Indo-European family which has been so criminally sundered by space. Won't that be a proud achievement?"

I had to explain to him, assiduously, how Indian music had contrived to live by feeding on melody alone, flowering into Raga-music and how unlimited was our scope for creation while singing or playing—the greatness of an Indian musician depending on the variety of his improvisations as well as the sweep of his creative ability at every step of his exposition. I pointed out how harmony had to thrive in European music at the expense of melody and suggested that it could hardly be otherwise, as European music formed a composite whole with its polyphonic setting.

Rolland wrote to me afterwards:

"Naturally the musical art based essentially on harmony sacrifices a good deal in the direction of melody. But does not the art founded on melody too sacrifice as much of other beauties? In the last analysis, every art depends for its evolution on a free choice between disparate elements of the reality, which, consequently, must entail a convention as well as a sacrifice. It would be unfair to demand of a play what does not fall under the rules of the game."

With regard to my writing about our music in Europe, he commented in the same letter:

"I feel you would be wise to write about the music of your country and tell us about its spirit. Only do not fight shy of technicalities. You would do well to explain to us not only the sentiments of your mind in its deepest strata, but also the technique whereby you arrive at the translation of such sentiments. Otherwise we would feel stranded as it were on a sort of vague lyricism. I have often had the impression that this is one of the most serious errors you, Indian writers, perpetrate when you launch out into vague generalisations about art."

* * *

At the end of 1921 I went to Berlin where I took lessons in voice-training and violin for about a year. About the middle of April the following year I received an invitation from the International League of Women for Peace and Freedom at Lugano to deliver a lecture on Indian Music. It was there that I met for the first time Bertrand Russell. Rolland too came to attend the conference. I had then the pleasure of discussing our music with him more fully as his sister had translated my discourse into French. Then I left for Prague (via Venice and Vienna) to lecture at the Conservatorium there.

Next I went to Budapest on a similar invitation. Lastly, I visited Rolland at his residence in the Swiss town of Villeneuve in August (1922) on the eve of my return to India after a three and a half years' stay in Europe. It was on the 16th and 17th of that month that I had once more the privilege of long conversations with him which I recorded then and there. Here they are, revised subsequently by him.

Our conversations were preluded, as usual, by music. I began with a song on India now famous in Bengal. Here is a literal translation of the same:*

Mother India, when thou rosest
from the depths of oceans hoary:
Love and joy burst forth, unbounded,
Life acclaimed Thee in Thy glory.

Darkness fled before Thy splendour,
Light its radiant flag unfurled;
All acclaimed Thee: "Hail, O Mother,
Fosterer, Saviour of the world!"

Earth became thrice-blessed by the
rose of beauty of Thy feet,
Blithe, she chanted: "Hail, World-charmer!
Hail, World-Mother! Thee I greet."

Damp from ocean's kiss Thy raiment,
from its waves still drip Thy tresses;
Greatness spans Thy brow, and flower-lit
lucent-pure Thy smiling face is.
Sun and moon and stars go dancing
through the vastness of Thy spaces,
While below 'mid ocean's thunders
foam of waves Thy feet embraces.

Earth became thrice-blessed by the
rose of beauty of Thy feet,

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* The song and tune were both composed by my late father D. L. Roy of Bengal.

Blithe, she chanted: "Hail, World-charmer!
Hail, World-Mother! Thee I greet."

On Thy brow the snow's corona,
round Thy knees leaps ocean's spray:
Heaving rivers rise and fall like
pearl-strings to Thy bosom's play!
There, in desert places dire and
bright and bare in heat Thou blazest.
Here, 'mid garnered world-flung riches
with Thy golden smile amazest.

Earth became thrice-blessed by the
rose of beauty of Thy feet,
Blithe, she chanted: "Hail, World-charmer!
Hail, World-Mother! Thee I greet."

Through the void Thy winds sweep clamouring:
mighty, tireless, huge of wing,
Kissing Thy feet melt in bird-song:
storms with hymns their homage bring.
O Thy clouds' rich wild rain-music!
lighting-stringed their thunderous lyre!
O Thy gardens, drunk with fragrance,
With ambrosial hues on fire!

Earth became thrice-blessed by the
rose of beauty of Thy feet,
Blithe, she chanted: "Hail, World-charmer!
Hail, World-Mother! Thee I greet."

Mother, peace nests in Thy bosom:
in Thy voice Love's courage glows:
By Thy hand are fed earth's millions,
from Thy feet salvation flows,
Deep Thy joy is in Thy children,
Deep Thy suffering's tragic night:
Mother India, great World-Mother!
O World-Saviour! World's delight!

Earth became thrice-blessed by the
rose of beauty of Thy feet,
Blithe, she chanted: "Hail, World-charmer!
Hail, World-Mother! Thee I greet."

I explained to him that it was in the scale of what is known technically as *Yaman* in our Raga-music, corresponding to the ancient Lydian mode of the Greeks, and showed him how one improvised while keeping oneself within the bounds determined by the Raga.

Rolland appreciated the song warmly and congratulated me on this high heritage.

Next he showed me round his little villa overlooking Lake Leman. I saw on his shelf French translations of many books on Buddhism and of Hindu philosophical works such as the Gita, the Upanishads, etc.

"I feel happy to see," said I, "that you take so much pains to be well-posted in our scriptures, particularly the Hindu philosophy. For I have found that although there are many orientalists in Europe who have heard distant rumours of Buddhism, very few know that there is such a living thing as Hinduism. The reason perhaps is that Buddhism has been distinctly missionary in spirit, while Hinduism has been by far the most exclusive religion on earth, as our great Vivekananda once regretted."

Rolland told me that Hindu philosophy had ever been a source of inspiration to him. We talked a little on Hindu art and then about art in general. I asked him what he thought about the seeming self-sufficiency of art and the egoism of artists.

"It is a mistake," he said, "to demand from art what does not lie within its sphere. And as for egoism, I do not think it applicable to a true artist. For has he not often enough to face personal hardships for the sake of his art?"

"But does not the artist's supreme detachment from the vital suffering of his fellow-beings amount to callousness? I feel often inclined to put down the much-vaunted spiritual isolation of the artist to his insensitiveness to the most vital things that cry out for recognition. He simply is not there!"

"But why? Do you think that the creative endeavours of art can't and don't prove a daily succour in our sorrow? There was a time you know when I was not very well-off—when I could only afford the galleries of the theatres and concerts. There I used to see again and again how the tired, pale faces of those hard-worked poor people about me leapt to life whenever the music or the acting caught fire. A single symphony of Beethoven is certainly worth half-a-dozen social reforms. Then again, the more downtrodden a community, the greater its spiritual need of art. The more grinding the miseries from without, the more fortifying the consolation from within.

"This is no mere theorising for the sake of an antithesis," he added. "It is borne out by the general testimony of human experience. Take for instance Tsarist Russia. It is patent how their arts and crafts had explosions of splendour under the despots' tyranny and this is but another illustration of the refusal of the Spirit to be tamed by adversity. The old story: the more you try to crush the spirit of a people, the more they turn back to their inner resources of which art is an outflowering."

"Besides," he went on, "one man cannot do everything. You cannot be the sum-total of a sailor, a mason, a carpenter and a humanitarian and what not—no matter how intense your desire to be tangibly useful to society. An artist can achieve best in what he is cut out for. It was not an accident that mankind should have hit upon division of labour for self-effectuation. If Beethoven were suddenly to materialise before me today racked by the problems of human misery, I would only say to him: 'Brief is our span of life, sire, so make haste to give us what you have to give. Because, were you to be carried off today, the harm done to the world would be irreparable—since none else can give us what is up to you to give.' This applies to each one of us in our respective vocations in life."

"But do you not think," I asked, "that the down-trodden and the lowly may have a say in this matter? May they not reasonably grudge us our unmerited luxury and joy of artistic activities at the expense of their unrelieved drudgery? For surely, it is at their expense the well-placed artist earns his bread and leisure. But for their payment in unremitting labour wouldn't our spiritual life with its inner joys become an impossibility? Who but these poor wretches of the lower depths have paved the way smooth for us, superior artists and thinkers?"

"But here you are making the common mistake," answered Rolland, "of ignoring the fact that for a true artist the career of art is anything but a gay round of easy vanities and savoury pleasures only. His path is not strewn with roses. Take, for instance, the great artists of Europe. Do you think they did not have to pay dearly for the recognition and eminence they won in their lives? And how few of them have had even a bare recognition in their lifetime! Or it came late in the day—after years of suffering, neglect, solitude and struggles with the world and themselves—as I have depicted in my lives of Beethoven, Michael Angelo, François Miller, Tolstoy and others. In fact, Tolstoy in his letter to me insisted on this point, that the vindication of the truly artistic vocation lies in the trials and tribulations cheerfully suffered and nobly accepted. That knocks the bottom out of your indictment of easy egoism against the artist." *

"But," I said, "when one sees so many artists leading a life of comparative luxury and comfort and plain-sailing—"

"Only second-rate artists lead such an easy life. No truly creative genius under the actual conditions of European society can ignore the misery prevailing—far less

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* This paragraph and the following, Rolland wrote out, supplementing his remark, on the margin. He wrote them in French asking me to translate and add them to my report.

the hiatus between himself and his backward contemporaries."

"But all the same," I demurred, "may not the masses justifiably clamour for a better order of society? For, when all is said, theirs is a far harder lot, as you must allow. So may they not, with reason, refuse to be exploited for the advancement of the intellectuals? In a word, may not the down-trodden and the destitute claim the minimum of well-being and comfort? They may well refuse to be consoled by the play-balls of the artists' creations, may they not?"

"To be sure," said Rolland, "and that for a superior reason too. For the present order of society is undoubtedly a wasteful one: tens of thousands of talents might have opened out fully under more favourable circumstances. Every intellectual ought, therefore, to devote at least a part of his leisure hours to the elimination of the obvious social injustices and inequities. So far agreed. But why must he, on that account, disown his native mission? A great painter, Carrière, used to say that every social wrong and tyranny would hurt his aesthetic sense. There can be no true artist but will feel in the same way. For one of the deepest creative impulses of the artist lies in his realisation of unity in apparent diversity. But every oppression is a discord—an anachronism, which cannot but vitiate the best artistic inspiration at its source."

"I am reminded," I said, "of Yeats' famous Poem, *The Rose in the Heart*:

All things uncomely and broken
all things worn out and old,
The cry of a child by the roadway,
the creak of a lumbering cart,
The heavy steps of the ploughman,
splashing the wintry mould,
Are wronging your image that blossoms
a rose in the deeps of my heart,

The wrong of unshapely things,
is a wrong too great to be told,
I hunger to build them anew,
and sit on a green knoll apart,
With the earth and the sky and the water,
remade like a casket of gold
For my dreams of your image that blossoms
a rose in the deeps of my heart."

"Quite," he acquiesced. "So you come inevitably to the vital question: what would you have the artist do? That a better order of society than the present one should be inaugurated, and the sooner the better, nobody can nor will seriously dispute. For all must regret that today the great majority should be shut out, willy nilly, from the boons of culture which are indispensable to the life of the Spirit. We agree about the disease: the trouble is about the remedy, isn't it? Now, my whole life has taught me this that the first and paramount duty of the artist and the intellectual is to be true to his inner call and urge—sleeplessly: he must above all keep the lamp burning in the shrine of inner perceptions—and must create whenever his daemon goads him to. This done, his surplus time and energy he may devote to the betterment of social conditions, as Goethe did. He served society, but only during lulls in his creative inspiration. When, however, his daemon took possession of him, he found it impossible to attend to anything else."

"But the question remains: for whom does the artist create? Is it not, in the last analysis, for a handful of privileged beings?"

"Not necessarily. With every improvement of the industrial technique and organisation, more and more men get leisure for the cultivation of art and thought. One can very well see which way the wind blows these days. Is it not towards the nationalising of all works of art and bringing the cultural contributions of the few within the reach of a continually widening number? Take, for instance, the steady increase of free museums, art galleries, public parks, gardens and libraries, cheaper concerts, popular theatres, etc. Who will deny that this is a move in the right direction, inviting within its periphery more and more guests to contemplate high works of art—offering to all the joys that were once the prerogatives of royalties and noblemen? Who except the philistines will fail to see that there could be no true salvation for culture if the masses were left out in the cold? A top-heavy order of society could hardly be stable, as all realise today. But why confuse the issue and be hard on the innocent? If only a few of us have so far been able to taste of the joys of art, that isn't the fault of the artists any more than it is an inescapable condition of art itself. For the artist does create for all times. Men must realise that more and more with the gradual spread of culture."

"But is it not a fact all the same," I insisted, "that to the vast majority of men today the highest art is as good as meaningless? For it is surely the truly educated alone who can be said to appreciate art properly; and surely they constitute but a small minority."

"What you say," said Rolland, "is true—but only on the surface. I will try to explain this to you at some length. I must, however, warn you beforehand that these views of mine are not in consonance with those that happen to be in vogue among the artists.

"I am definitely of opinion," he went on, "that real art must of necessity appeal to all but the half-educated. That is to say, all really great art must appeal to the uneducated and well-educated alike. Only the half-educated have to be ruled out—that is, those who flatter themselves that it is for them alone that great art is fashioned. They are impervious to the appeal of art probably because the grinding-mill of our so-called modern education cures them effectively of that freshness of spirit which is responsive to art. Thus they are unconsciously incapacitated for drawing the right kind of inspiration from art.

"However that may be, truly great art must appeal to the uneducated and the truly-educated nearly to the same extent, even though they may look at the same art from different standpoints. You may not accept my theory that the absence of culture does not blind men to the beauty of art.* I will therefore give you a personal instance to show that our education has much less to do with our artistic enjoyment than is popularly assumed. I was then a mere stripling—still in my teens, quite uncultured, musically. I loved popular music. But I could react to it with about the same intense joy as I did, subsequently, to our classical music. My point here is that the heart, unsophisticated by our so-called education, is still homesick for art, which cannot, unfortunately, be said of the half-educated whose love of art is so proverbially banal and shallow. You demur that the uneducated will not be able to judge adequately of the difference between superior and inferior art. Maybe. But my point is that this is not to be put down to any inbred incapacity on their part to respond to the evolved art. What is responsible is their forced preclusion from opportunities for self-culture which alone can serve to educate the tastes."

* Cf. Rolland's interesting remarks in his "*Musiciens d'aujourd'hui*": "It is a mistake to claim that a deeper knowledge of a work of art intensifies the enjoyment of its contemplation. Its knowledge informs the enjoyment, but withal renders it cold in that it dilutes the mystery. The enigmatic fragments of the concerts (heard in the days of my unsophisticated youth) used to assume the colossal proportions they did by virtue of what the heart and the imagination wove around it all. Now, however, we have traversed the paths much too often, having learnt since to recognise the sovereign order and reason which once lay submerged behind the apparent delirium of the imagination. The idols are shown up in full glare. Each wrinkle of their faces has now become familiar to us, with the result that we can no longer perceive in their presence the same young thrill of bewildered emotion."

"You said just now," I said after a pause, "that the educated and the uneducated react differently to the stimulus of great art. May I ask you to be a little more explicit?"

"Have you read Nietzsche's *Origin of Tragedy?*"

"No, why?"

"Because if you had, you would have found it easier to follow what I am going to say. However, I will try to put it as lucidly as I can. In that book Nietzsche has delineated two types: Apollonian and Dionysian. The former are the disciples of Apollo and stand for pure intellectualism. The latter are the disciples of Dionysius and stand for unbridled emotionalism. The outlook of each on life is valid up to a point, but the correct view of life should aim at the harmonisation of these two attitudes. Most of the highly educated want to look at art from the Apollonian angle of vision: the intellectual. They want to enjoy art by dissecting, scrutinising and analysing it. The uneducated, on the other hand, accost art emotionally, passionately, with no preoccupation as to the necessity of solving its mysteries. The highest appreciation of art is only possible when you strike the golden mean between the two attitudes."

"But can that be done?"

"In the case of all genuine connoisseurs and artists, yes. For with the born artist this power of harmonisation may be said to be almost native, instinctive. In Beethoven, for instance, one finds this happy harmony in its full, native spontaneity—this marriage of the intellectual appeal with the emotional. The emotional nature of the average man generally gets overlaid and atrophied with age. But a great artist retains his native freshness unimpaired. For that is almost a *sine qua non* of his art. Wagner composed his famous "Parsifal" when he was 63 years old, which shows that his creative reservoir had not dried up even at that age."

From the topic of Wagner we deviated to Tolstoy, his decrier. I asked Rolland what he thought of Tolstoy's views about art as being essentially egoistic.

"Tolstoy," he said reflectively, "was a strange man. The reactions of his *grandes passions* goaded him as often as not to the most regrettable and extreme observations. So much so that he seems at times to have positively orgied in this kind of sweeping generalisations. For instance, he once even went so far as to assert that our consciousness should be focussed only on the useful—since the study of the starry dome could not lead to richer harvests on earth. Aren't three enough urgent problems for us to solve—to help our comrades out of their sufferings? * That even a man of Tolstoy's native idealism should have committed himself to such an Arcadian, pragmatic materialism only brings into bold relief his later reaction against the top-heavy intellectualism of his age. He actually fumed against its hollow heartlessness and callousness. One would do well, therefore, to take the inveighing of Tolstoy against art and science with a great deal of reserve. For it is, when boiled down, but a reactionary attitude towards life—a pose masquerading as humanitarian idealism."

"Do you not think, however," I asked, "that it is possible for us to boost up art from motives of hidden self-interest? For when all is said, you must admit that a life devoted

* Sa religion est concrète, terrèstre humaine. Elle travaille la terre; elle a les pieds agglutinés a la glèbe. Elle s'inquiète peu de savior ce qu'il il y a au-dessus des nuages. Ce qui la sollicite, c'est le plus urgent: et le plus urgent c'est de savior que faire ici-bas, toute de suite."

(His religion is concrete terrestrial, human, content to till the earth, its feet wed to the soil. It is little concerned with flyings beyond the clouds. What stirs it is what is most urgent—and the most urgent thing is to know what we have to do here immediately.)

("Tolstoi Educateur" by Charles Beaudoin, celebrated psychoanalyst of Geneva.)

to the study of art or science is on the whole much more pleasant and titillating than many another vocation? For if you admit this, then you have to admit also that there are grave risks of our extolling art from promptings of self-interest."

"I admit that there are grounds for your misgivings," said Rolland a little thoughtfully. "But if one thinks over the matter carefully one cannot, I think, hold the ideal responsible for it all. First of all, because no true joy is essentially meaningless, and secondly because no personal joy that is sincere and deep is self-centred in its play, far less in its repercussions. For, in the mysterious and wonderful scheme of things, what brings deep joy to one cannot stop dead and isolated there: it is the nature of joy to radiate. Look deep and you can't but be struck by suggestion of this unity in the diverse rhythms of life."

After tea, Rolland took me to his library. He showed me many souvenirs and mementoes; among these there was the original letter which Tolstoy had written to him in 1887. He had addressed Rolland as "Cher Frère," though the latter was then but an insignificant adolescent. It touched me to read the very first few lines of the letter. For he wrote thus:

Cher Frère, J'ai reçu votre première lettre. Elle m'a touché le coeur. Je l'ai lue les larmes aux yeux. (Dear brother, I have received your first letter. It has moved me to my depths. I read it with tears in my eyes.)

The thought of the world-celebrity having been moved to tears by the letter of an unknown foreign youth thousands of miles away reminded me forcefully of Rolland's thesis that a great artist must retain unimpaired his emotional fervour and freshness of spirit. His body may, indeed, age with time: his spirit—never.

"What I find so impressive about Tolstoy," I said, "is his sleepless sympathy for the downtrodden starveling. In his position, hardly one in a million would, I think, have worried so much about the miseries of the miserable."

"You are right," Rolland echoed warmly. "For it is there we must seek the key to his greatness, of spontaneous reactions. He felt the pulse of the world with the throb of his heart's blood."

"I think," I said, "people are not far out when they say that his mantle has somehow fallen on our Mahatma Gandhi. In our mythology there is a word, *manasaputra*, meaning a son born not of one's flesh but spirit. Gandhiji is, I often feel, just such a *manasaputra* of the Russian Patriarch."

"He is, besides, a saint," he added, "don't you think so? I ask you this because I intend shortly to write his biography."

"I sometimes feel inclined to think he is," I said, "if by saint you mean a personality to whom the temptations of the flesh do not mean as much as they mean to the multitude. For it seems to me that he has somehow always seen a light where we, commonly, see nothing but darkness."

"The Mahatma is indeed wonderful!" Rolland murmured almost to himself. "Wonderful! A flame amid flickers, a beacon in stormy waters! His pacifism, non-violence, life of spotless purity, sincerity—well, there is so much in him, in one man, a giant spirit in such a frail frame! Who would have believed such a flowering of faith possible in our starless days of pettiness and selfish fears! The only thing I object to in him is that his outlook is not international, but national."

"I wonder if one can call him national in his outlook," I demurred.

"I do not use the word national in the narrow sense—nor have I any doubts as to the catholicity of his spirit. I am quite convinced, for instance, that his type of nationalism is untainted by antipathy to other nations, and I feel sure he is a nationalist because he is convinced of the high destiny of the Hindu nation. He may be right for aught we know about Hinduism. Only I want to assert that this is not internationalism." Then he smiled and added: "Next year, if I should go to your country, I might be proselytised into this kind of nationalism, who knows?"

Our conversation again reverted to art. I asked:

"Should art be uplifting in its very nature? That is, should it always have a moral background? I sometimes think it should though the dictum, 'art for art's sake' repudiates all moral and ethical obligations. But if this doctrine were true, then would not the mission of art be exhausted in supplying to the human soul a mere ephemeral joy, pleasurable no doubt, but of no very deep import or significance?"

"First of all, it is well, I repeat, to take one's stand on this bedrock truth that no true pleasure or joy is ephemeral. For every true thrill and delight must of necessity elevate us, bequeathing its leaven of permanent inspiration. But another thing must equally be borne in mind in this connection: this feeling of elevation or elation is not necessarily a handmaid of *bad* art married to a lofty moral. Take, for instance, any didactic poem or novel of the banal type. You will find after reading it that for all its high moral fervour, you are not a bit the wiser. Take next some recognised work of art without any moral whatsoever. You will find it will breathe into you something bracing, even uplifting, as you put it. A friend of mine, Malwida von Meysenburg, a lady of the highest culture, wrote in her reminiscences that once in a great crisis of her life she witnessed a performance of Othello, which gave her a clue to the meaning of life: so much so, that she recaptured thrills of life and colour where there had been only a grey waste of listlessness. Yet, Othello can hardly be called a play with a moral, can it? A thing of beauty does refine and purify us and often without even our knowing it."

"Pardon me," I said smiling, "but doesn't this savour of *our* oriental mysticism?"

"What if it does?" asked Rolland, amused.

"Well, *you,* occidentals are not, as a rule, very kindly disposed towards mysticism, are you? Is it not the name you give to many an undesirable thing you want to hang?"

"True," said Rolland, laughing, "that is, generally speaking, of course, because I, personally, have always felt that mysticism is a great boon of the Gods, and I would hardly care to live in a world from which all the mystic savours are banished for ever. For I value mysticism as a perennial source of some of the most glorious thrills that are given to mankind to experience." *

The following day we began our conversation with the discussion of our favourite Russian trio, Tolstoy, Dostoievsky, and Turgenev. I asked Rolland what he thought of the last. He replied that he considered him a great artist as well as stylist.

"Do you think he was a greater artist that Tolstoy?" I asked.

"Unquestionably," said Rolland, "the art of Turgenev has much greater affinity to the Latin art. For this reason in France he was highly appreciated at a certain epoch. Tolstoy is more Russian, but is also much more human and universal. His power as well as native capacity was undoubtedly much superior to that of Turgenev. He had, besides, much greater depth and much more to say. His creative genius was so powerful that he continued to create till the end, in spite of his decision to renounce art. Turgenev was a genius too, but Tolstoy's genius was of a higher order. Everything is great with him—his defects not less so than his qualities. Turgenev is fine: Tolstoy—magnificent."

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* Rolland wrote on the margin here: "I add that what you call mysticism is a sentiment common to the greatest geniuses of Europe, especially musicians. This applies as much to J. S. Bach, Handel, Beethoven and Wagner as to many another of sterling qualities and real depth. On juge trop de l'Europe par sa 'Foire sur la place.' Il y a une autre Europe aussi profondèment religieuse que l'Asie la plus mystique. Read *Jean Christophe* for verification as it is not a fiction but an epitome of the contemporaneous experiences of Europe."

"Turgenev was, however, an artist to the core," I said. "Prince Kropotkin has written in his '*Memoirs of a Revolutionist*' that Turgenev once told him how he had actually shed tears for having made an end of his Bazarov in his '*Fathers and Children*.' I was touched to read this."

"Great artists have often been seen to live vicariously in their creations," said Rolland. "Balzac, for instance, once met a friend of his in the street and the first thing he did in his then highly-strung frame of mind, was to mourn the death of his hero, a character in the novel he was writing at the time."

"I read somewhere that Balzac was an indefatigable writer."

"He was a curious man among artists," said Rolland animatedly. "He never bothered much about art and style and so forth. He had such a super-abundant vitality that he was wont to ride on the crest of his enthusiasm. He often conversed with his friends all the time thinking intensely of his creative work. His mind then hardly reacted to the external stimuli even when he ate and drank and talked with his friends and relations. In a word, he wrote because he had to."

"But that I suppose is a common characteristic of all true artists?"

"Oh no!" exclaimed Rolland. "Zola, for instance, was quite of a different type. He used to write off regularly about thirty to forty pages daily. He was differently constituted from Balzac who once wrote out a whole novel in twenty-two hours without stopping once."

"There are some artists," I said, "who do not know how they are going to conclude when writing a romance. I have Tagore in mind who told me that he never knew beforehand how he was going to finish a novel. But I always had the idea that the artist must have a mental picture of the denouement when he begins a romance."

"Not necessarily. There have been artists, such as Molière, who look upon the denouement as of very little consequence. He even went so far as to say that the end was quite immaterial. According to this view, an artist takes up his pen only to portray types, and once that is achieved his task is accomplished."

I asked him what he thought of a certain famous European writer. He had written to me in a letter that the latter was as good as dead to him.

"He exists no longer for me," he answered nonchalantly with a shrug.

"How do you mean?"

"He was a great artist, but terribly lacking in character. The superficial excitements of society have made an end of him. He has become just a society-man today—a dilettante. Just think," he added animatedly, "not only did he consent to prostitute his talents for success but even stooped so low as to write about mysticism *à la mode*. You cannot serve God and Mammon simultaneously, any more than you can cater to order and yet remain loyal to your vocation. That is my chief count of indictment against him. And then he fell under the charms of the demi-mondes of society. Once you get caught in the coils of such sinister influences, well, you are doomed. For the creation of truly great art must demand the very best of you. You can't prepare a banquet with the leavings of yesterday's dinner. This is not to deprecate social intercourse. You may have it but not to the neglect of your *mètier*."

I was much struck by the almost religious seriousness of Rolland whenever he spoke of art. Few, I felt, could feel so deeply about art as to think that it must in its very nature thrive on the lifeblood of the artist.

Truly has his Austrian biographer remarked that "his apostleship not only reclaimed to some extent the discredited gospel of Christ crucified, but stood up boldly for the poet's faith in his mission as a spiritual leader and a moral spokesman of all nations." *

We then discussed the last war. Incidentally I asked him what he thought of the future of internationalism in Europe.

"Not very bright, I am afraid," he said, a little sadly.

"But do you not feel that men are daily overcoming their short-sightedness and learning to think more seriously in .terms of humanity?"

Rolland shook his head ruefully. "I wish they did," he said. "But, unfortunately, the number of sincere internationalists is very small. There are, for instance, many who would denounce other nations with great gusto when the latter fought. Yet the same people would sing quite another song as soon as their own country was involved."

"But that men should be sacrificing themselves without appreciably promoting the cause they die for—"

"Is not a very cheering spectacle," put in Rolland ironically. "Mais que voulez-vous? Surely the fact of its being unpalatable or disheartening is no argument against its truth."

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* "Nur sein Apostolat hat das Evangelium des dekreuzigten Europe gerettet, and mit diesen Glauben einen andern noch: den an den Dichter als den geistigen Fuehrer, den sittlichen Sprecher seiner Nation und allen Nationen" *Romain Rolland: der Mann und das Werk* by *Stephan Zweig*.

"What about progress then?"

"Ah! You come now to a knot which is hard to untie. For what, indeed, is this cryptic word which we choose to spell 'progress'? We may very well go on asking till the end of Time, seeing how difficult it is to *prove* that we are really progressing continuously. At least that is how I read history. Our civilisation has not only had its forward strides, but its lapses as well; I understand that some drawings by pre-historic man have been just discovered which bespeak a very superior culture, superior, I mean, to the culture of the dynasties that followed. What is the inference if not this that, for some reason or other, the parent culture had perished. The result: the infants that followed had to begin anew from the beginning and climb once more, slowly and laboriously, from the virgin abyss of barbarism. The spectacle of the heroic rises after repeated tumbles is doubtless a noble one, but that does not account for, far less justify, the senselessness of Nature's vagaries and extravagances. Who, for instance, with a spark of human feeling in him, could help shying at the terrible havoc wrought by the last war? Even to appraise the cost in point of moral degeneration is far from easy. But mankind will rise again for all that—maybe to fall once more—who knows?"

"But what about the final goal then? Why such pointless dissipations after accumulations? Will every such rise be always neutralized by a fall?"

"Ah, my friend," he answered with a shrug, "there you have me. For who can prevision any finality in the scheme of things? Speculations about the final act of the drama of Life are sterile. It would be much more to the point to achieve the little bit of good that lay within the ambit of our power."

"But what about the incentive to activity, creative or humanitarian, if one has no flaming faith in the future of humankind?" I asked. "If the sum-total of the huge expenditure of our collective energies is not going to lead us anywhere, why believe in make-believes?"

"Perhaps it is true that one might do a little more work if one could be propelled by a burning faith. It may also be true to say that many of the world's eminent men have accomplished comparatively more through the motivation of optimism. But even *their* work, how much of it has proved lasting after all? By which I mean, how many do derive vital inspiration from such apostles today? How many, pray, do have real faith even in a Buddha or a Christ—not to mention the lesser prophets?"

"But surely," I contended, "you are not going to deny they were illuminated by an inner light!"

"Who knows?" said Rolland with a pensive smile. "We know next to nothing of the spiritual struggles of Christ. And do not his last words indicate that his faith had failed him at the crucial moment of his life when he cried: 'My God, why hast thou forsaken me'?"

"Pardon me—but doesn't this savour of pessimism?"

"Not a bit. It is only a case of heroic tragedy. It emphasises, if anything, our duty to love Christ all the more for having been in such an abyss of suffering when he sacrificed himself. I mean, it only fortifies our faith in martyrdom so that we may not capitulate to the dark hordes of falsehood and hatred, greed and cruelty."

"But do what you will, if progress were a myth how could one put one's heart into the fight?"

Rolland smiled, a trifle sadly. "You stress the word progress again and again," he said. "But whatever do you really mean by the term? Can anybody really tell us whither we are being led? Let us suppose, hypothetically, that we have satisfactorily solved all vital problems that confront us today. What next? Do you mean to say that our day's work will then have been done for good and all? Is life like the story of a fairy king and queen who after the initial vicissitudes just go on living happily ever afterwards? Is that conceivable? No, my friend, creation could never have a well-defined end, any more than it had a precise beginning. We have therefore no choice but to try to know more, still more, fighting injustice and oppression resolutely, sleeplessly. 'Progress?' If by that word you mean our complete deliverance from all global evils, then I confess I believe that to be a fantastic Utopia, especially when we see that the human life has been built on the sepulchres of billions of creatures big and small. So I am for each of us doing his bit, that is, the utmost bit of good that he can achieve, and let the consequences take care of themselves. I know at least that this is good and this is bad. My native sense of right and wrong tells me this in an unmistakable accent. You may contend that this sense of right and wrong isn't a sure guide for all, since human conscience is so variable. I admit it *is* difficult for the majority of men to distinguish the eternal values in life from the temporal so that conscience as a guide to objective morality is no less bound up with our evolution than is our intelligence or artistic gift. All the same, you have within you only this light—and no other—wherewith to pick your way and shift for yourself as best you can. I would therefore say: 'let us act up to our highest lights available and let our aims be the highest we can focus our gaze on. Never mind if they are temporal glimmers or shining orbs for all times. The essential thing is that these convictions should be sincere and that there should be no falsehood nor compromise with ourselves.' Why worry about the finality of it all? There is an old French proverb which says, 'Fais ce que dois! Advienne que pourra'! *

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* This sentence which means 'Do what you ought to, come what may' he wrote at the end while correcting this report.

I was reminded of the somewhat parallel sentiments of Anatole France: "Travaillons à ce que nous croyons utile et bon, mais non point dans l'espoir d'un succés subit et merveilleux, non point au milieu des imaginations d'une apocalypse sociale: toutes les apocalypses éblouissent et décoivent. N'attendons point de mirâcle. Resignons-nous à préparer pour notre imperceptible part, l'avenir meilleur que nous ne verrons pas."

(Let us work for what we consider useful and good, but not upbuoyed by any hope of a speedy and marvellous success, nor lured by the imagination of a social apocalypse: every apocalypse dazzles and deceives. Let us not look up to miracles. Let us resign ourselves, each doing his imperceptible part, to bequeath a better future which we shall not live to see).

When I ponder back now over these conversations, as also the hopes and fears they reflect, I often catch myself wondering how Rolland may be feeling about the topsy-turveydom of our world now in 1944 when the forces of darkness are formidably phalanxed against the last sparks of the light of humanity and charity, and when their dread eddies swirl with a catastrophic rush sweeping the finest flowers of culture into the dead abyss of atavistic barbarism! Does he realise now that without a fundamental change of human consciousness nothing lasting can be achieved on our earth, everlastingly a prey to Hell's own legions which pullulate like fungus in the blind shallows of our selfish passions?

I do not know. I would like to ask him. I hope I will be able to, some day, as it is hard to believe the recent rumour of his death in a German concentration camp. May our incredulity prove justified in the end.

* * *

I returned to India in 1922 and for a few years toured our musical centres to study the existing styles of our old music on which I wrote a book, perhaps the first of its kind, giving our music-lovers all the available data about our musicians, bayadères, pundits, and virtuosos. During this time I wrote to Rolland from time to time as he remained always keenly interested in our modern musical movements.

In 1927 I received an invitation from America and decided to accept it. I was to give lecture-demonstrations there as also to make a few records of our best music. I proposed to revisit Europe where I had made many friends, of whom Rolland was one of the most precious.

I visited first the Côte d'Azur whence I went to Paris, London, Oxford, the Lake Districts and lastly Edinburgh where I delivered a lecture on our music at the Old Fellows' Hall. Then I crossed back to the Continent and went to Vienna where I stayed with the writer Rene Fülop Miller. There I gave a lecture at the Urania on our music and as the response happened to be quite beyond my expectations I wrote once more to Rolland telling him about the fulfilment of his prophecies: yes, Europe could respond to our melodies, I *had* to agree.

Kind and interested as always, Rolland wrote back to me warmly congratulating me on my success in Scotland and Austria. He cordially invited me again to Villeneuve in Switzerland. As I arrived at his charming little villa, Mademoiselle Madeleine Rolland, his sister and collaborator, received me with her rarest smile of welcome.

At lunch-time Rolland's old father joined us. It was delightful to see the unreserved friendliness that marked the give-and-take between the father and son. I was reminded of a character in his novel, the old father Colas Brugnon spilling vitality, vivacity and laughter. There was between them not a shadow of constraint which, alas, so often mars the affection of the Hindu father in his dealings with his son. All Indian fathers are not Motilals, although, to do them justice, the sons who are Jawaharlals are a shade rarer still. I told Monsieur Rolland of this and I well remember how his octogenarian pater was amused to learn of the Indian father being such a stickler for parental dignity. "But," I said, "our mothers make it up to us, you know, by babying us till our age of sunset. That is one of the reasons why we can't even dream, like the Germans, of calling our country fatherland! Give us the mother, we say, and we will love equally the ethereal Spirit and the material Earth in her luminous image." How they laughed!

We discussed also Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. Monsieur Rolland was at the time reading up voluminous literature on the two radiant personalities, shining like twin stars against the dark sky of modern India. Naturally I was delighted when he spoke of them with his characteristic warmth of love and adoration. A remark of Anatole France recurred to me that day: "L'artiste doit aimer la vie et nou montrer qu'elle est belle. Sans lui nous en douterions." * How prophetically true! Especially now, when our surface-view of Life is anything but *beautiful*. Yet, when all is said, such individuals do shine like the only lighthouses amid the angry waste of foaming passions which, we are taught, supply the natural dynamisms of human life! *Natural*—indeed!

After lunch Rolland asked me to sing to him. I sang a song of my own composition, the translation of which I give below:

The blossom never knows the fragrance sweet
That in its bosom's mystery lies,
The deeps that mirror forth the Infinite
Question its secrets with their sighs.

For whom throng still the murmuring bees,
Restless amid the perfumed trees?

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* The artist should love life and show us that it is beautiful. Otherwise we would be inclined to doubt it.

Whose memory thrills the impassioned breeze
And paints the magic skies?

Whose one lamps through the way-lost night
Glimmer in moon and starry light?
Whose glory in the dawn breaks bright?
For whom yearns all and cries?
For whose greatness down the ages long
Are the wide heavens a sapphire song?
For whom runs the stream with babbling tongue,
  Repeats whose harmonies?

Whose breath perfumes trees, flower and grass,
Inspires the atoms' dance in space?
Whose trailing robes in twilight pass,
  A shadow in longing eyes?

Oh, if thou never wilt appear,
Why are thy masks of Beauty here?
Why sound thy anklets everywhere,
  The spell that never dies?
My heart forgets that in my heart
  Thy throne for ever lies.

And then I sang a famous song of my father from his historical drama, the Fall of Mevar, where I have translated it thus:

Why vainly shed thy tears, comrade,
  And sigh: "Our freedom's gone!"
Sing from the summit of thy stature:
  "I live for Truth alone."

Why wouldst thou still the others indict?
Thy little ego thou must fight,
  Not for the others art thou fallen,
    'Tis Falsehood holds thee down:
  Sing from the summit of thy stature:
    "I live for Truth alone."

All o'er the world two forces battle:
  Darkness opposed to Light.

Loyal to Heaven's solar legion,
Confront Hell's hordes of Night.

If thou wouldst slay this gloom abysmal,
Waken thy Sun within
And discover in its dawn: no alien
But is a brother of kin.

Forget all thought of thine and mine,
Behold in all the one Divine,
Unfrontiered earth's thy home and country:
The house of self disown;
Sing from the summit of thy stature:
"I live for Truth alone."

Affianced to thy sentinel soul,
With God as Guru and the Goal,
Disclaim thy pride of race and country,
For the Soul belongs to none
But the Lord of Truth and Love everlasting,
Live thou for Him alone.

It gave me delight to sing to him. I felt almost grateful to him for his sympathy and power of entering almost at once into the spirit of each song. This I told him frankly. He waved my compliment away laughingly and attributed his emotion to the intrinsic beauty of the compositions themselves. His sister, who also appreciated the songs, after thanking me said:

"Dilip, why don't you yet undertake the task which my brother and I have been urging you to do? When will you publish your music in Europe?"

"To tell you the honest truth, Mademoiselle Rolland," I replied hesitatingly, "somehow I have all along thought that it would be wasted labour. Would Europe be really able to look at our music in the proper way?"

"What matter, mon cher Dilip?" put in Rolland. "Is it for us to grumble and vacillate lest our work should be ill-received? Why must you always be probing the fitness or unfitness of your audience? Give what you have to give, and with both hands. If there is anything of lasting value in your contribution, believe me, it can never altogether miscarry. Our task is to give of our best—to sow. The rest doesn't depend on us. The sower can never know beforehand what the harvest will bear. Why be such a stickler about the precise way your music should be received? How can you assert that this, and no other, is the way others should react to your music?"

"I stand rebuked," I said, "only, supposing the sower himself felt dubious about the harvest you speak of, could he really have the heart to sow? For, you must agree that there *is* a real risk of our art being misunderstood by the bulk of Westerners. Its message may be quite wrongly interpreted and made banal."

"There you are at fault again," said Rolland. "For how would you, I ask you, put your finger on any particular interpretation of any art as its unique message? My *Jean Christophe* has appealed to thousands in thousands of ways. I need hardly tell you that not one has grasped my own idea. But does that really matter? Each of us receives a work of art in his own way; he picks from it what he needs and leaves the rest alone.[*] When he does not find in it what he needs he just conjures it up. And why not? I quite agree that your music could never appeal to Europe in the way it appeals to *you*, but can that matter, so long as the seed is sown in the soil as it should be sown? Its fruition may not always be immediate—but be sure it will come all in good time, though we may have no clue just now to the ultimate shape or form it will take." †

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[*] In a letter dated 31-7-22 he wrote something very similar: "One does not create a work of art to impose one's thought—one merely sows. Toute création est une génération. Celui qui engendre ne peut savoir le fils qui sortira de lui. (Every creation is a procreation and the procreator cannot know the child that is going to come out of him.) He only broadcasts life far and wide. The only thing he should be careful about is that this life should be healthy. The rest does not depend on him."

"You know, Monsieur Rolland, that I have all along differed from you on this point. In the course of my present tour through Europe, however, I have had to modify my views. For I found this time, to my agreeable surprise, that musical people in Europe very often react vividly to our music in the most unexpected fashion though their reaction is not, as you say, similar to ours. That is why I have decided at last to write about our music for the European public. Only"—I paused—"there are times when old misgivings surge up again, like the irrepressible mushroom. Then I restart wondering, pessimistically, if by writing down our music we would not stand to lose more than we would gain. And I cast about then for a better method of ushering our music to the West. But I wonder if I have made myself clear?"

"I think I can see what you are driving at. And I am by no means blind to the risk you refer to. But you see, it is like this: so long as you can devise no better method of demonstrating your music to the West, you have to make the most of such outlets as you have. For getting something is surely better than getting nothing at all!"

"I wonder!" I replied dubiously. "Suppose, for instance, that throughout the musical notation Europe were to look at Indian music from quite the wrong angle? Would your remark still hold?"

"What exactly do you want to convey?"

"Suppose you were to form quite wrong notions about our music and miss altogether its fundamental points and salient features. For instance, suppose, in judging our music from the purely European standpoint you were to underrate the value of the unrivalled freedom which a Raga-musician enjoys missing altogether our delicate intervals, grace-notes, style and so on. At least, when we write down our flexible and supple music, this is not unlikely to happen, as you must admit. Granted this, don't you think that such a prospect may well take the wind out of any enthusiast's sails?"

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† He wrote me once: "Nothing is lost in nature. If the seeds you have sown are healthy—depend upon it, some grains will be sure to bear and some sparks bound to kindle—perhaps not immediately, nor in those whom one would have imagined the fittest to profit thereby but—sooner or later, here or elsewhere—seeds with the fire of life must yield a harvest of light. One has only to have faith in the irresistible force of life."

"I now see what you mean," returned Rolland, "and I allow this that here your fears are not altogether groundless. I too have felt this sometimes, forcefuly. And it was borne home to me lately at the centenary celebrations of Beethoven in Vienna."

"How?"

"Well, you see I found this year how even Beethoven's music has lost the edge of its freshness through being continually played from written music."

"You surprise me, Monsieur Rolland," I said, "for I should have thought that through the spread of your musical culture Beethoven's music would, on the contrary, stand to gain in the volume of its appeal."

"You are right—up to a point. For, mind you, Beethoven's music has *not* lost in the sum-total of its moving power—to the layman, that is. In fact what struck me most this year was that his music appealed today to a far bigger public than it had ever done before. Only—and this is what I mean by the above remark—it has no longer the same grip over the *musical people and connoisseurs.* For instance, I do not thrill to it as I used to in my days of youth. It has no longer the same freshness. But you mustn't, on that account, omit to look at the other side of the picture: that Beethoven's music is enjoyed today by the largest world-audience—speaking statistically. And for this to have been possible, we owe, indeed, a deep debt to the development of our system of notation.

So the fact that writing music down has its disadvantages does not put the evidence of its advantages out of court."

"But here you raise a rather nice point in aesthetics, Monsieur Rolland, though we are digressing I'm afraid—"

"Never mind," smiled Rolland. "We are not exactly discussing a joint thesis, are we?"

I smiled and said: "You say in effect that Beethoven's music already shows signs of becoming a little archaic if not antiquated. Doesn't that amount to belittling his genius?"

"How?" challenged Rolland. "Beethoven has greatly helped to widen the horizon of human receptivity and musical perception. He has deepened our powers of comprehension and opened up new vistas in aesthetic enjoyment. I should add, he has cleared the way for his successors to follow and explore further and has thus left a noble heritage which has emancipated more and more men from a life of lesser loves."

"But is this really the last word in our aesthetic evaluation? If one appraises a genius in proportion to one's receptivity, then it follows that the truest estimate of an artist is that of competent connoisseurs and not of laymen. If you concede this, then you must accept its corollary that Beethoven, were he living today, would derive little consolation from the irrelevant fact of moving a bigger public.

"Allow me to make my meaning clearer by an analogy," I added. "What would Shakespeare have valued more—the appreciation of a giant Goethe or that of a million Liliputian philistines? With regard to aesthetic criteria may it not be justly claimed that the real critic is born somehow with a native insight into what constitutes the essence of artistic greatness? That is his 'raison d'être,' I should think. Were it not so, could his appreciation ever prove an eye-opener to laymen and a source of inspiration to the artists? Beethoven's case is just an instance in point. He may go on daily appealing to a greater and yet greater number of musical innocents, but can that ever compensate him for the loss of his appeal to the connoisseurs, as you state?"

"There is a difference here between music and literature," returned Rolland thoughtfully. "Music may, I think, be safely looked upon as the purest vehicle for our emotional expression in the realm of art. Its appeal is direct—through pure sound values. Literature, however, has to filter down through the medium of vivid and moving words and thoughts and images before it can seep into the recipient's mind. In a sense, therefore, music speaks to us in a language which is somewhat different in kind from that of literature. The result is that, while music is more universal and direct in its appeal, literature is, somehow, more stable and less susceptible to the mutations of time. Consequently, the dramatist Shakespeare's instance is not strictly valid as against the composer Beethoven."

"You have set me thinking," I remarked after a pause, "only I wonder if your remark would apply wholly to our Indian music?"

"How do you mean?"

"You said just now that music does get antiquated. Perhaps it is true with regard to *your* music, and perhaps that is just the reason why *your* music has made such giant strides during the last three centuries, who knows? . . . I suggest that it is just possible that your insatiable thirst for variety is attributable to the peculiar tendency of your music to age quickly with the result that the sensation of kaleidoscopic novelty has developed into a sort of necessity with you. But that is rather beside the point," I anticipated him. "For I am hardly competent to discuss *your* music and the Western psychology that responds to it. I made that suggestion rather tentatively and my object was to hint that perhaps here your music differed radically from ours. It is this aspect of our music that I want to discuss with you."

"Do," said Rolland with his characteristic polite smile, "I am all attention."

"I will first explain to you our position. It is a matter of common experience with our music-lovers that an old Raga (a melodic theme) never fails of inspiration, no matter how often we hear it. That is, it does not get antiquated as quickly as your music does. For our connoisseurs not only do not find it growing stale and trite through repetition, but they discover new beauties in it every time they hear it. Were it not so, the old forms of our Raga Music would have become quite archaic and obsolete by now, every Raga being sung or played in hundreds and thousands of ways and interpretations through the length and breadth of India. But that it does *not* pall to this day can be testified to by the consensus of opinion among our musical élite. Such a subtle evolution would have been impossible if our music was sensitive, like yours, to the mercurial caprices of time. For instance, we have musicians who are not only interpreting Raga-music in general, but are specialising in a handful of individual Ragas. X specialises in the Raga *Bhairavi,** say. That is, he sings nothing but songs in the Raga *Bhairavi*. So people say X's forte is *Bhairavi* and a few allied Ragas. Y specialises in the Raga Malkous,† that is, Y has devoted his whole life to the exploration of ever new beauties in *Malkous* and its kindred Ragas. Z's skill has found expression in the family of Ragas of the *Kanara* group, and so on."

"Now you see," I continued, "such a high degree of specialisation in an art could not but have flagged if our music had been as deferential as yours to the vagaries of time. But such specialists are still adored by our music-lovers, our ancient Raga-music continues to be a far more lasting source of joy to us than your old music is to yours, and this is a cogent point to be noted. It might, of course, be contended that the appeal of your music is daily gaining ground among your masses, whereas ours is still confined to a narrow coterie of connoisseurs. But here I ask myself once again whether this consideration is really relevant to any true appreciation of music. Your music enjoys greater popular support, but ours gives the same undiminished thrill to our music-lovers. In fact, they enjoy it even more with age, since they daily find new unsuspected beauties and glimpse new possibilities. This is not an exaggeration, Monsieur Rolland. For instance, I have heard a particular song in Raga *Yaman* sung by a great singer—Rai Bahadur Surendra Nath Mazumdar—at least two hundred times, still I look forward to hearing it again. And why? Because far from finding it antiquated I feel that it never loses in point of edge and freshness and inspiration, because it is never rendered twice exactly alike."

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* From E to E on the piano in the diatonic scale as its mode.

† A pentatonic Raga: C E^b F A^b B^b only,—a Raga sung for hours with marvelous improvisations only on these five notes.

In conclusion I added: "I have laid stress on this aspect of our classical music in the course of my recent lecture-tour on the continent, and I trust you will not think that I have imagined things."

"I don't," said Rolland musingly, "and the reason why your music continues to retain its freshness is not far to seek. For one thing, you improvise continually, which means that your executant creates at every step, while in our music he is but an interpreter."

I was very glad to hear this since this was precisely what I had to say again and again to my European audience while stressing the longevity of our melodies.

"And then," he added after a short pause, "writing down our music has been not a little responsible for the fact that our art ages sooner than yours—as I was telling you. For while, on the one hand, a piece of music has the advantage of being stabilised and perpetuated the moment it is caught in the toils of a system of notation, on the other the advantage only accrues at the expense of its soaring capacity, a capacity that is generally retained intact by a music that is not standardised through being written down. When we pause to reflect how much our folksongs have lost as soon as they have come to be written down by the compilers of folk-music, we vividly appreciate how little we have to gain by stereotyping these through hard-and-fast systems of notation. For, it has been found again and again that a country which has been rich in folk-lore and folk-music loses both as soon as an artist makes use of them."

"Do you then imply that writing music down is inadvisable on the whole?"

"No—one can hardly go as far as that. For our huge superstructure in the realm of music, erected on the plinth of harmony, would have been unthinkable without some system of notation." And then, he added, "as soon as one sits down to write what comes from above, one's creative impulse cannot but be stirred, so that our habit of writing music down has proved a real incentive to the creative mind of the Western composer."

"Will you be a little more explicit, please?"

"As soon as a piece of music is written down, the creative mind heaves a sigh of relief—of fulfilment as it were. For the very act of writing satisfies the artist's hunger, the thirst, the imperious need for self-expression through outpouring. And this release gives his mind respite which in its turn makes him avid again for new creation. For as soon as an artist has created something out of himself, he ceases to take interest in it and must perforce turn to fresh creations. That is why I said that for the marvellous strides our music has made of late, our highly evolved system of notation has been by and large responsible.

"Besides," he continued, "popular taste can never gain in refinement except through the one process of bringing it into contact with what is fine. There is no other way—no shorter cut to culture. Written music discovers in an exhibition, as it were—what is best in the Pantheon of sound, thereby elevating the common man's taste little by little, often without his being aware of it himself. This is, doubtless, a great gain. The only regret is that every boon must entail a corresponding disadvantage, every gain a loss. One would naturally wish it were otherwise; but if one accepts the forward movement in life, one must, simultaneously, turn one's back on a great many things as one moves on. You can't both eat your cake and have it, you know! *Que faire?*

"Yet," he continued, "I for one would hold it as exceedingly regrettable if, through the introduction of a notation system, you too were to travel farther and farther away from your beautiful and glorious tradition of creative improvisation."

"Do you think that the introduction of a system of notation will be detrimental to our genius in this direction? Might we not introduce a system of notation within definite limitations—or rather cadres—thus incorporating what is good in the notation-system of Europe without losing what is precious in our own system of creative exposition of the Ragas?"

"I wonder!" said Rolland meditatively.

"Listen," he suddenly added, "it is curious that only the other day I was discussing with a Spanish musician a rather similar problem with regard to the state of music in modern Spain. I think I told you once that the Spaniard keeps alive to this day his old tradition of improvising on the melody while singing or playing." * I nodded; he continued:

"Now, this musician was regretting that the introduction of musical notation as well as the starting of musical schools and colleges in Spain is visibly impairing this native capacity of his countrymen for improvisation. Yet musical schools and colleges and notations may well be looked upon as almost an inevitable adjunct to modern times. So my Spanish friend was casting about for a way out of this *impasse:* how to imbibe the modern spirit without sacrificing the inspiration of the old. His problem has some kinship with yours, hasn't it?"

* * *

Such was the last conversation I had with Rolland. Its lingering perfume still abides with me. I do not remember having ever met one whose native insight into music impressed me more, who has contributed more to my musical wisdom. Which is not to say that it was his knowledge of musical lore that made the deepest impression on my mind. The most precious of his gifts to me was his personality radiant with a tinge of sadness even as the dying fire in a sunset cloud. For it was, indeed, such a melancholy radiance from its altitude of faith. I often visualise him, retrospectively, sauntering slowly past a gay café in which I sat, one among a party of pleasure-hunters. He was alone. An air of languor and other-worldliness hung about him. His sallow, wistful face with its sharp outline was tilted upward, his shoulders bent in a slight meditative stoop. For a while he stood poised on a rim of the blue lake, immobile like a statue, his solitary figure silhouetted against a strip of roseate sky suspended between two ridges. He gazed on the wondrous scene like one entranced, for how long I do not know. The liquid colours in the sky began to travel like subtle nomads to set aflame new cloudlands and in the depths of the sapphire waters were reflected parallel columns of quivering gold. He looked on—enchanted, rooted to the ground. Suddenly, with a mighty effort, he wrenched himself free from his mood of dreaming and gathering himself recommenced his walk. I watched him with intent gaze receding slowly into the twilight till he vanished out of sight. I was then assailed by a mystic sadness, a haunting sense of the futility of the hollow merry-makings around me. The robust self-confidence of the orchestra rang strident in my ears, the laughter seemed like loud irony. Then a sentence of his began to reverberate in my mind: "A man worthy of his name must learn to be solitary for all, to think alone for all." It epitomized the life of Romain Rolland.

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* He wrote to me once: "If you visited Spain you would still hear everywhere living and popular melodic forms whose flow and evolution has been checked in Europe since the Middle Ages, thanks to modern poliphony."

28 September, 1928. Villeneuve,
Switzerland.

Cher Dilip K. Roy,

I send you back the reports of the three conversations you had with me as also that with Tagore which you sent me for perusal. It is so beautiful . . .

In your report entitled, *Progress and Heroism,* I have attempted to correct, in places, an unconscious misinterpretation of some of my thoughts. I hope you will be able to read my hand-writing. To be more precise I will add:

(1) Tolstoy is for me incomparably greater than Turgenev. There are very few Frenchmen who would dream of placing under the same category the gigantic force of Nature incarnated in Tolstoy, the creator of *War and Peace*, and the merely excellent artist, Turgenev. They do not represent values of the same plane.

(2) Your rendering of my thought on "Progress" tends to present me in a somewhat pessimistic light. Incidentally, is it not curious that I, an occidental, should be able to do without the idol of progress which you, an Indian, find rather dismal?

So far, as I am concerned, I have no need of this idol, because, for me the *present* comprises in itself the *eternal.* Salvation is not stowed away into an uncertain future: it is here, in the immediate present. So everyone must save himself here and now. Humanity in its entirety is in each individual, even as the Eternal Spirit is immanent in every passing moment. That is why I attach, at best, a secondary importance to this question of progress.

As for scepticism, I do not see any in my comment on the dying words of Christ. On the cross, he cried out at the last moment: *"Eli, Eli, lamma sabactani?"*—"My father, my father, why hast thou forsaken me?" This tragic cry moves me to my depths even now every time I hark back to it. How could you see scepticism in such a sentiment? It is perhaps the most poignant tragedy that has ever been enacted under the vault of the sky! Picture to yourself a heroic Godhead, a God among men, who, wanting to sacrifice himself for humanity, ends on the point of winning Immortality by losing faith in his mission! And why? Because, having been married to mortal conditions, he had, perforce, to plumb the depths of human suffering and humiliation of moral capitulation. Could there be anything more moving, more sublime?

But for me it is not a reason which impels me to capitulation. I could never give up the fight. On the contrary, all my favourite heroes in my *Tragedies of Faith* and *Lives Heroic* have been, from the point of view of the worldly-wise, the vanquished; but the vanquished who yet claim:

"J'ai devancé la victoire, mais je vaincrai": Victory shall come after my death; it skills not when it comes, for I know that my Faith is true.

Anyhow, I write and live for those who are ready to sacrifice themselves for the sake of a *Faith they love and love without any illusion about success or victory over their contemporaries.*

Read the first lecture which Vivekananda delivered in 1896 on Maya and Illusion. How close is the kinship I feel for his tragic conception of the world to say nothing of his faith in heroic action. And there have always been in Europe a number of spirits of this stamp.

To your interview on *Art and National Life* I would append:

Never have I been able to regard the life of a *real* artist as that of a careerist or a mere egoistic pleasure-seeker. I know too well that in Europe all the greatest artists—like Michael Angelo, Rembrandt, Beethoven, etc., had to be, like Christ himself, *"Hommes de Douleur"* (Men of Sorrow). It is almost a prerequisite of real genius. Genius must first pass the test of misery, solitude, doubt and general miscomprehension. Tolstoy in his letter to me goes so far as to assert that it is the test which distinguishes the *real* artist from the mountebank: qu'ils doivent sacrifier à leur foi, à leur art, leur bonheur terrèstre.* The life of a real artist, being made up of renunciations, could be little short of intolerable for the commonalty. If the artist missed his inner joy and faith in his creative genius, he would not be able to breathe: he would succumb—asphyxiated. He must, anyhow, create for himself the air necessary for respiration. There again is the call to heroism—the heart of a lion.

You seem surprised at the incredible impression made by Othello on Malwida von Meysenburg. But do you know that the impression produced on the general public of the Théâtre Française (in this very Paris, called so superficial) by Sophocles' grim tragedy *King Oedipus* was something very similar in nature? Pain at a certain intensity is transmuted to exaltation and all the great tragic poets of the Occident know it. Thus it is by no means a mysticism which is peculiar to the Orient. Only one must crown it by the sovereign harmony—the natural concomitant of a great art. The most beautiful quartuors of Beethoven towards the end of his life, the sighs of Amfortas in Wagner's *Parsifal,* are instinct with the same mortal anguish of the soul, but the sublimity of the crucified soul becomes a divine boon for those who can aspire. One comes out of such ordeals like steel purged through fire. Nurse no doubts about the element of moral energy which is at the source of all great souls and all great achievements. For us the first thing needful in the world is Energy. (It is not only Beethoven who said this, but your Vivekananda as well.) Without energy there can be nothing great, with it—nothing feeble. *Ni vice, ni vertu.*

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* "That they sacrifice their worldly happiness to their faith and art." (*Letter of Tolstoy written to Rolland*)

Je vous serre affectuesement la main,

Croyez-moi
Votre dévoué
Romain Rolland.

Lundi 20 mars 1922, Villeneuve.

Cher Monsieur D. K. Roy,

Your generous letter has touched me. I hasten to reply though not at as great a length as I would have liked to: for I am pressed for time just now.

I can fully understand your conflicts. I went through them myself not so long ago. It is a similar questioning that prompted me to write to Tolstoy when I was still an adolescent. Today my troubles have subsided. A life of trials and tribulations, of solitude and hard struggles has shed some light (specially during the last few years) on the enigmas which seemed to me all but insoluble heretofore.

Tolstoy's *confessions* are admirable. His anguished reactions to the world's miseries are, indeed, poignant. But I still insist that Tolstoy is a bad guide. His tormented genius had always been incapable of finding a practical way out. His great fraternal compassion made him condemn art and science as among the privileges of the élite even though he had never been able to forego the privileges of an artist: he went on, till the end, producing every morning his works of art as though by stealth. But had he not conquered the world by the glory of his great art, his moral and religious thoughts would not have travelled as they did with their far-reaching repercussions.* So he never could have the strength to renounce his art with its privileges and he suffered from this contradiction. Il faut savoir ce que l'on veut. Et ce que l'on veut, il faut le faire. (One should know what one wants. And what one wants one should do.)

It was not Tolstoy's circumstances, his wife and family, which were responsible for his indecision, although he fastened the whole blame upon them. The responsibility lay, first and last, with himself: he obdurately wanted the truth to be what his fundamental instinct warred against. And here it was not his instinct that was at fault: the fact was that the truth, as he envisaged it, was insufficient, incomplete.

The serious error of Tolstoy (and of many another) lies in wanting to simplify human nature too much. In reality, every human being is a sum-total of several beings in one, or—if you will—a being living on several planes simultaneously: a polyphony. Intellectual reasoning, which has culminated in civilized man into a sort of tyrant mania, would have our rich complexity reduced to a formula clear and simple, neat and abstract, like a syllogism. This is possible with the mediocre who, possessing but little of life, suffer little from a stunted spirit. But those who are truly living could scarcely lend themselves to such a mutilation without imperilling the whole organism (this is termed 'refoulement' in the terminology of psychoanalysis): the nature one wanted to stifle takes its revenge and the victim of such repression is unhappy, distracted, perpetually unsatisfied, a prey to aberrations and despondencies.

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* These two sentences ("His great. . . .repercussions") Rolland wrote revising my translation in a letter dated 3-6-1930. See this letter at the end.

Hence, none of the great salutary forces of the being should be maimed or thwarted. On the contrary, an understanding encouragement should be given to a harmonious development of all healthy impulses. And for this to be possible one should learn to recognise the essential elements of one's nature. Above all:

1. The social man—the man living in community with others, with his duties and moral obligation towards them.

2. The individual man with his needs and his spiritual obligations.

It isn't that either of the two is less important that the other. It is an aberration of the mind to wish to sacrifice one for the other. The thing is to give to each what is its due.

As for yourself, believe me, your artistic gifts impose on you corresponding obligations which are not a whit less imperative than those of charity or service. For a man's duty is not done if he thinks only of his contemporaries —his neighbours: he has to take count of his debt to the Eternal Man who, emerging out of the lowest depths of animality, has climbed obstinately through centuries toward the light. And what constitutes the ransom for the liberation of this Eternal Man in bondage is his conquest of the Spirit. All the efforts of the savant, the thinker and the artist compete for this heroic campaign (campaign in the sense of battling against odds); whoever among them repudiates this obligation—were it even for the sake of altruism—betrays his ultimate mission.

Which does not mean that he has no other duties side by side with this. On the contrary, his special task accomplished, everyone should find the time and energy to do his duty by universal Man. He should parallelly serve the spirit (*i.e.*, art, science, thought) and Humanity. I say *parallelly* because these two classes of obligations are on *different* planes: when the Spirit is in quest of Beauty or engaged in search after Truth, no practical consideration must weigh in its free and disinterested activity even as when one wants to serve humanity one should listen to no other voice than that of Love and active Goodness. Why unnecessarily oppose the one to the other? Why not allot to each its rightful share and harmonise the two?

At bottom the problem is to achieve the just equilibrium, the complete harmony where their diverse voices merge. To a musician such a solution is perhaps easier than it is to anybody else: for (as the Sage, Heraclitus said) his native instinct teaches him to weave even out of dissonances the finest harmony. And it is also easier of accomplishment to a son of India whose time-old thought knows the secrets of the harmonious wisdom much better than does the thought of Europe.

Every one should in his turn seek to find himself—to find, that is, his proper and unique equilibrium out of the diverse elements: for every one should be as he is at bottom—a unique and different chord. The interest of life lies in striving for this realisation. And whosoever realises this has not lived in vain since he thereby becomes what he was meant to become. It is even the definition of joy on earth.

Bien affectueusement à vous.

ROMAIN ROLLAND.

November, 1922,
Switzerland.

Cher ami,

Your beautiful letter from Naples moved me deeply and I regretted to learn that you had sailed for India. I had hopes of seeing you once more this winter. There was so much I would have loved to discuss with you, starting with our common friend, music . . .

No, there is no gulf between the musical art of Europe and that of Asia. It is the same Man whose soul, one and multitudinous like the tufted oak, seeks to embrace in its ramifications the illimitable and unseizable Life. I love the oak in its entirety. Through all I love to hearken to the soughing of its massive branches. I want to glut my ears and my heart with their composite and moving harmony.

You are right in judging every race by its best types. A hero of Corneille said:

"Rome n'est plus dans Rome; elle est toute où je suis." *

Every race is incarnated in its superior types not in its transitional actuality, but in its millennial profundity. The best types do not, indeed, represent what their people are today, not even (you will perhaps take it again for pessimism) what the latter will grow up into at some future date. They represent at bottom the virtual forces and the gigantic possibilities inherent in their stock, even though the stock will never perhaps have the energy and the time completely to realise these possibilities *en masse*. And so it must ever be: a minority of choice spirits shall always be centuries ahead of the masses whom they can understand, and even love—as they ought to—but the masses will never understand them for what they are. Either they will mock at them and sometimes crucify them for being what they are, or else they will acclaim them and sometimes deify them for being what they are not. This need hardly distress you. For did not the hoary wisdom of India see, ages ago, that all men were not born at the same stage of development? There will always be some who are born infants and stay infants all their lives even as there are others who belong, from the moment of their birth, to a remote future. Heraclitus has aptly said that all these differences and even discords contribute to the plenary beauty of the harmony.

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* Rome is no longer in Rome, she is where I am.

Écoutons l'ensemble du concert! The present moment is but a transitional chord,—bitter, rich and cruel maybe, but it will resolve in the next phase in the chord that succeeds. Let each of us care only for playing the part allotted to him with conscientiousness, sincerity and unselfishness. And if it so happens that those whose parts belong to the noblest and deepest are misunderstood, they do not stand in need of commiseration. They are amply repaid by the joy they experience of the beautiful music which falls to their lot. What matters if "others" misjudge them? The "others" are not the judges. The Judge is the Invisible Master of the Symphony.

I intend spending the winter at Villeneuve. Today my little house is quite encircled by snow.

But it is very beautiful and refreshing. Under its white cloak the winter stimulates the outflowering of the inner life. No, I do not pine at all for Paris. But I regret the distance that sunders me from the few friends that I have, among whom you are one.

Les trois hôtes de Villa Olga vous envoient leur cordial souvenir. Et je vous prie de me croire votre affectueusement dévoué.

ROMAIN ROLLAND.

Switzerland,
1st October, 1924.

Mon cher Ami,

I thank you for what you have written to me with regard to Sri Aurobindo as well as for his review *Arya* which you have sent. I entirely agree with your outlook. *I know as yet too little of Sri Aurobindo, but from what little I know about him I am persuaded that there is in him one of the highest spiritual forces in the world.*

Among Europeans I find myself rather isolated in so far as my outlook on India is concerned. The majority repeat, blindly and obstinately, the slogan: "Asia is Asia and Europe is Europe" . . . One of the best known nationalistic writers of France, a fire-brand, has just unearthed the existence of a new conspiracy to betray the Occident to Asia, and he naturally denounces me as its ring-leader . . . But apart from such extravagant mentalities which see red in everything, I have found that the majority of our Western writers still persist in subscribing to the shibboleth that the spirit and thought of Asia is essentially repugnant to that of Europe and must always remain so.

But what, indeed, do they know of the thought of Asia? Precious little, and that little through secondhand citations and superficial passages. Practically everything they know about India, when boiled down, comes to Buddhism, and what do they know of that either?

Now listen to my personal experiences. I find in Sri Aurobindo's *Ishopanishad* his analysis of its three couplets which run thus:

"9. Into a blind darkness they enter who follow after the Ignorance, they as if into a greater darkness who devote themselves to the Knowledge alone.

10. Other, verily, it is said, is that which comes by

the Knowledge, other that which comes by the Ignorance, this is the lore we have received from the wise who revealed That to our understanding.

11. He who knows That as both in one, the Knowledge and the Ignorance, by the Ignorance crosses beyond death and by the Knowledge enjoys immortality."

What is it that I find here? Just what I myself had discovered, unaided, at the age of twenty, when I wrote the same thing in my *Credo quia Verum*. Only the names of the Hindus were naturally absent from my thought, since I did not even know then that such thoughts existed in India: I spoke out what lay burgeoning deep down in my soul. Doubtless the commentaries of Sri Aurobindo are more opulent and the revelation in the *Upanishad* more complete than that of a French stripling of twenty. But it was exactly the same thought-movement, the same discovery.

Now, I am a Frenchman of France born in the heart of France in a family which has been nurtured on her soil for centuries. And when I was barely twenty I had no knowledge of the religions and philosophies of India. I had not even read the rare philosophers like Schopenhauer who had been replenished by them. I infer therefore that there is some direct family affinity between an Aryan of the Occident and an Aryan of the Orient. And I am persuaded, my friend Roy, that I must have descended down the slopes of the Himalayas along with those victorious Aryans. I feel their blue blood coursing and throbbing in my veins.

I am in hopes that I will see Tagore this time when he comes to Spain wherefrom he sails for Peru. Andrews will be sure to accompany him.

Croyez à mon affectueux devouement.

ROMAIN ROLLAND.

Villeneuve,
3rd June, 1930.

Mon cher Dilip K. Roy,

Thanks for your letter. I return the manuscript you sent me for revision. I have nothing to alter except in your translation of my letter on Tolstoy (dated 20-3-22). There must be some error somewhere. I do not remember what I wrote.

Mais j'ai dû dire qu'en fait, Tolstoy n'a jamais pu renoncer à ses privilèges d'artiste: jusqu'a là fin, il a continué décrire des oeuvres d'art, comme en se cachant, chaque matin. Et s'il n'avais pas conquis le monde par sa gloire de grande artists, jamais sa pensée morale et religieuse ne serait repandue partout, avec cet immense retentissement.*

What you have recorded from Mahatma Gandhi's remarks on art I found most interesting. But you did not give him the right answer. You ought to have said to him:

"Humanity is always on the march. The intellectual élite is her vanguard, her pioneers, paving the way along which the entire humanity shall pass eventually. It would therefore be wrong to represent this élite as separated from the rank and file because the latter lags behind. And he would be an indifferent leader of the people who would constrain its vanguard to march with the bulk of the army." *

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* The translation of this passage has been given in the letter referred to.

L'humanité est toujours en marche. L'élite intellectuelle est son avant-garde, ses pionniers. Elle fraie les chemins, par où l'humanité toute entière, ensuite, passera. Il est donc faux de représenter cette élite comme separée de la masse humaine, parce qu'elle la devance. Et il serait d'un mauvais chef de peuples de vouloir obliger son avant-garde à marcher dans le gros de l'armée.

You may add this rejoinder, if you find it good, in a note on your interview with Mahatma Gandhi.

À vous très affectueusement.

ROMAIN ROLLAND.

Villa Olga
Villeneuve

Juin 3, 1933

Mon cher ami,

I was deeply touched to receive from "The Mother" the beautiful volume of her "Conversations," and I request you to convey to her my respectful thanks for her kind gift. Please, also, accept your share of the thanks since it is to you I owe this gift.

I have read this book with a great admiration for this lucid and firm intelligence which commands a rare mastery of expression. You are fortunate, indeed, to be under the aegis of two great spirits whose union forms such a rich and perfect harmony.

À vous tres affectueusement,

ROMAIN ROLLAND.

(This was the last letter I was to receive from the great soul who could respond so generously to greatness wherever he saw it.)

MAHATMA GANDHI

MAHATMA GANDHI

THE first two of the conversations I present here date as far back as 1924. On each occasion I had, as usual, kept a faithful record. Subsequently I amplified some of his (Mahatmaji's) ideas just a little and sent him my transcriptions for his final revision. He made corrections in a few places and granted me his kind authorisation to publish his views as adumbrated here. In his covering letter he wrote: "I return your reports with the fewest possible alterations." This humility, so characteristic of him, has made him one of the best-loved figures of our times. It led him to write to me once:

"Dear Friend . . . Much of the reputation that I enjoy in the West is really undeserved and I often think that if I went to Europe or to America, the people there would be soon undeceived about their many exaggerated notions of me. You would believe me when I tell you that I write this not from any sense of false self-depreciation, but because I feel it that way." *

It was on a crisp golden morning in February (1924) that I saw Mahatma Gandhi for the first time in my life. He was then convalescing in a Poona hospital after an operation for appendicitis. Strictly speaking, he was still

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* This letter dated the 20th of September 1927, reached me in Vienna where I was invited to give a lecture-demonstration on Indian music. It was in reply to a letter of mine in which I had written how keen was the interest in him all over the Continent where I was being besieged with questions about him. I had suggested to him to visit Europe once.

serving his term of imprisonment in jail—having been sentenced for six years in 1922. But as the Government had already decided upon his release, which was to follow directly afterwards, access to him was comparatively easy. Visits, at this time, were being regulated only on medical grounds, not political.

Mahatmaji was reclining on his bed propped up by a wealth of pillows. His secretary and devoted friend, the charming Mahadeo Desai, a popular daughter of Sarojini Naidu, a politician with a head shaved into a gourd and a few other visitors were chatting cheerfully. Mahatmaji was busy as usual with his repartees and badinage, his face wreathed in smiles, luxuriating in the short respite granted to him, alas, none too often in his busy life!

I had entered the great patient's room with a heart palpitating with a nondescript excitement. I could hardly speak when he smiled at me from his bed. Who would say he was sick, with that radiance of childlike smile on his face?

* * *

I made him my *pranam* and said that I had come to Poona all the way from Bangalore only to see him.

"Oh, that is kind of you, indeed!" returned Mahatmaji with his limpid smile. His whole face softened in gratefulness, another well-known trait of his beautiful nature.

He invited me to a seat next to his cot and asked my name. I introduced myself.

"Oh," exclaimed Miss Naidu, "you are the musician—aren't you?—who has been to Europe studying music? And they say you want to import Western harmony into Indian melodies?"

"It is true I have studied a little European music in England and Germany," I said. "But I am afraid I have never been guilty of the dark design you so playfully suggest."

"But you *are* a musician all the same, aren't you?" put in Mahatmaji with his solvent smile. "So why words instead of songs? Won't you sing for a poor convalescent?"

"I should be proud to Mahatmaji," I replied. "Shall I bring my stringed instrument in the afternoon to accompany myself—that is, if the time suits?"

"It will suit me ideally," he said, "but no—wait, I must ask the sister first."

The nurse was sent for and he asked her if a little music in the afternoon would disturb the other patients.

"No, Mr. Gandhi," she replied sweetly, "you can have as much music as you like."

Mahatmaji thanked her and turned to me: "Could you then come with your instrument—well, say—at about five this afternoon?"

"I shall be delighted, Mahatmaji," I said, gratefully, "but do tell me one thing: do you *really* care for music?"

"What a question!" he said. "I have loved music—particularly devotional songs—since my childhood days. Of course I cannot claim, I warn you, any expert or analytical knowledge of its technique, but I cannot say I regret that very much, seeing that good music always moves me—genuinely. After all that is the essential thing, isn't it?"

"Of course it is," I nodded. "Only, if you will pardon me, don't you think such a knowledge generally deepens our appreciation for music as an art?"

"Maybe. But as I told you just now I have never pined for expertism. To me music is something to receive joy and inspiration from, and I am quite content so long as I get that."

"How well I remember," he went on retrospectively, "the joy and peace and comfort that music used to give me when I was ailing in a South African hospital. I was then recovering from some hurts I had received at the hands of some roughs who had been engaged to cripple me—thanks to the growing success of my Passive Resistance Campaign. At my request the daughter of a friend of mine used, very often, to sing to me the famous hymn, *Lead kindly light!* And how it acted like a healing balm—invariably! I still remember this song with gratitude. So there—are you persuaded that I really care for music—or shall I have to adduce more convincing proofs?"

We laughed.

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A long streak of vermilion, the last gift of the dying sun, lay on the floor at the foot of Mahatmaji's bed when I entered his room with my instrument, the *tambura.* Miss Naidu and Mahadeo Desai were there and two new visitors besides. I first sang a devotional song by a Hindi poet. I give below the translation:

To the haven of thy Brindaban
I'd wend with thy Love's lead:
Be my bed the dust by thy feet hallowed,
And alms my only feed.
For what else could one thirst, save thee?
What refuge, if not thine?
What other music e'er redeems,
Save thy love-flute divine?

My tears of longing flood the earth,
For thou art far, concealed,
Days bloom and wilt—brief flowers—since thou
Remainest unrevealed.
Soul's night aches for thy Dawn, life sobs,
A waste in the thrall of death!
Proclaim thy sun-dominion,
My heart of heart's one breath!

The second song I sang was Mira's famous *Chakar rakho ji* which I have rendered rather freely thus:

Make me thy servant—the last stain efface
Of selfhood: be my life an offering
In song's own bliss and bloom's own loveliness.

For beauty holds a mirror to thee, O King
Of Beauty's ultimate home—thy Brindaban
Whose glory in her bowers will I sing,

And accost thee daily in thy golden dawn:
In every flower, every purling stream
In changing forms deciphering the One.

Here, in thy happy haunt, where dreamers dream
And Yogis strive through Yoga thee to meet
And all who visit hail thy summit-gleam,—

Thy Mira treads but one way thee to greet:
She prays: "Besiege my heart at midnight hush
And on banks of Love's blue rill thy dance repeat."

His gentle eyes glistened as he gave me his beaming smile. I was touched by his response.

"Mira's songs are always beautiful," he said.

"I suppose you hear them often—in Gujerat?" I asked.

"Well—I know a good many of them. I like the members of my Asram to sing to me her lovely songs—so touching in their sincerity and poetic appeal!"

I was delighted, because among the mystic poets my favourites were Mirabai and Kabir.

"They are so moving," added Mahatmaji, "because they are so genuine. Mira sang because she could not help singing. Her songs well forth straight from the heart—like a spray. They were not composed for the lure of fame or popular applause as are some others' songs. There lies the secret of her lasting appeal."

"I feel," I said, encouraged, "that our beautiful music has been sadly neglected in our schools and colleges."

"It has—unfortunately," he agreed. "And it is high time for us to wake up to it. For it would be a tragedy indeed if our beautiful music were to die from sheer popular neglect and indifference. I have always said so."

This was corroborated by Mahadeo Desai.

"I am very glad to hear this Mahatmaji," I said, "because, to be frank, I was under the impression that art had no place in the gospel of your austere life. In fact I had often pictured you as a dread saint who was positively against music."

"Against music—I!" exclaimed Mahatmaji as though stung. I was startled. "Well, I know, I know," he added resignedly. "It is not your fault if you should have drawn such a picture of me. There are so many superstitions rife about me, that it has now become almost impossible for me to overtake those who have been spreading them all over the place. As a result, my friends' only reaction is almost invariably a smile when I claim I am an artist myself. Indeed, they take it to be a first-class joke," and he burst out laughing like a child.

"I feel so relieved, Mahatmaji," I laughed catching the contagion of his mirth, "but may not your asceticism be somewhat responsible for such popular misconceptions? For surely you wouldn't blame the people too much if they found it rather difficult to reconcile asceticism with art?"

"But I do maintain that asceticism is the greatest of all arts. For what is art but beauty in simplicity and what is asceticism but the loftiest manifestation of simple beauty in daily life shorn of artificialities and make-believes? That is why I always say that a true ascetic not only practises art but lives it.

"And to think," he added animatedly, "that I should be dubbed an enemy to an art like music because I favour asceticism!—I, who cannot even conceive of the evolution of India's religious life without her music! Why, it is the limit!"

"Why then do people suppose that you are unkind to art?"

"Well—well—there are some plausible reasons, I imagine. One is that I fail to see anything in much that passes for art in these days. In other words, my values are different. For instance, I don't call that a great art which demands an intimate knowledge of technique for its appreciation. To me art, in order to be truly great, must, like the beauty of Nature, be universal in its appeal. I cannot, for the life of me, call the power of making hair-splitting distinctions the test of artistic appreciation. True art and its appreciation can have nothing to do with sophisticated pretentiousness. It must be simple in its presentation and direct in its expression like the language of Nature."

"But I am told," I said, "you are averse to pictures on the walls of your rooms."

"There again, my friends always demur and take that to be another index to my native aversion to art. But why must my walls be overlaid with pictures if I thought that walls were meant only for sheltering us? Why may I not use them for other purposes?"

"But if other people should want to have pictures—"

"That is their affair, not mine. If it pleases them, let them adorn their walls with as many pictures as they like. Only I do not need them *for my inspiration*, that is all. Nature suffices for me and that's all there is to it."

"Have I not gazed and gazed at the marvellous mystery of the starry vault," he went on after a brief pause, "hardly ever tiring of that great panorama? Have I not the forests and the seas, the rivers and the mountains, the fields and the valleys with which to slake my thirst for beauty? Could one conceive of any painting comparable in inspiration to that of the star-studded sky, the majestic sea, the noble mountains? Is there a painter's colour comparable to the vermilion of an emergent dawn or the gold of a parting day? No, my friend," he smiled, "I need no inspiration other than Nature's. She has never failed me yet: she mystifies me, bewilders me, sends me into ecstasies. What need have I for the childish colour-schemes of humans? Beside God's handiwork does not man's fade into insignificance? And—to be more concrete—tell me, Dilip, how can art be so thrilling, after all, when Nature, the mightest artist, is there to cater for us?"

"I agree with you Mahatmaji, when you describe Nature as the mightiest of artists, as also when you condemn the pretensions of modern art. For who will deny that much of what passes for art today isn't quite worth its weight in gold? And what man in his senses will claim that the artist's handiwork is even greater than life's?"

"Exactly," concurred Mahatmaji. "Life must immensely exceed all the arts put together. For what is this hot-house art-plant of yours without the life-soul and background of a steady worthy life? It may be all very edifying to flaunt it, but what, after all, does this fussing with art amount to if it all the time stultifies life instead of elevating it? Is it not grotesque to claim—as so many artists do—that art is the crown of creation, the last meaning of existence?"

"Art greater than life indeed!" he rushed on, "as if you could ever truly live under the aegis of a slogan! As if the soul could be spoon-fed with just *one* principle of enjoyment! It is exactly when such high pretensions are loud in the land in the name of art that I have to cry halt. For to me the greatest artist is surely he who lives the finest life. It is therefore not art I repudiate, but the lofty airs it gives itself. In other words, my values are different, that's all."

"I suspect," Mahadeo Desai said to me laughingly, "that it is you who are responsible for what Romain Rolland has written in Mahatmaji's biography as regards his views on art."

"I assure you," I protested, "I never discussed with him Mahatmaji's views on art for the simple reason that I didn't even know what they were. And it may interest you to know, Mahatmaji, that so far as this view of yours is concerned, Rolland is entirely at one with you. For in his novel *Jean Christophe* he too has said that life must transcend, first and last, all that it expresses, articulately."

"Quite," said Mahatmaji. "To me life is far too great a mystery, far too sacred a gift of the Gods to be appraised adequately from one particular angle. And that is why," he smiled, "I said so categorically just now that the greatest artist is he who lives the finest life."

As I sauntered back that evening to my friend's bungalow, motley thoughts and questions crowded in upon my mind. I could not help contrasting Mahatmaji's views on art with Rolland's, which brought to my mind again and again the picture of Tolstoy and I could see how deeply our Indian saint's ideology had been influenced by the Russian artist's. To cite just a passage from the latter's 'What is Art':

> "The artists of various sects like the theologians of various sects, mutually exclude and destroy themselves. Listen to the artists of the schools of our times and you will find, in all branches, each set of artists disowning others. In poetry the old romanticists deny the parnassians and the decadents, the parnassians disown the romanticists and the decadents, the decadents disown all their predecessors and the symbolists; the symbolists disown all their predecessors and *les mages:* and *les mages* disown all, their predecessors. Among novelists we have natu-

ralists, psychologists, and 'nature-ists,' all rejecting each other. And it is the same in dramatic art, in painting and in music. So that art, which demands such tremendous labour-sacrifices from the people, which stunts human lives and transgresses against human love, is not only a thing *not* clearly and firmly defined, but is understood in such contradictory ways by its own devotees that it is difficult to say what is meant by art, and especially what is good, useful art for the sake of which we might condone such sacrifices as are being offered at its shrine."

* * *

It was at the house of Deshbandhu C. R. Das that I met Mahatmaji for the second time, nine months later, on the 4th of November. I did not know Deshbandhu in those days and had been content to admire him on political platforms from a distance. Having meanwhile written to Rolland about my Poona interview with Mahatmaji and received his reply I ached to read out the artist's comments on the saint's reactions to art. The big room was alive with visitors and political leaders of various provinces among whom Deshbandhu with his magnificent personality stood out like a tower of strength and self-confidence. His guest, in loin-cloth, looked frail indeed beside him. The contrast was fascinating.

He gave me a glance of welcome and smiled.

"Where is your instrument of torture?" he asked me as I made him my *pranam*. The reference was to my stringed instrument, the *tambura*.

"We'll see about that, Mahatmaji, when the leaders shall have left you half-dead with fatigue," I replied smiling.

"Right," he said laughing and then turning to Deshbandhu Das added: "You shall be his jailor. Beware: he mustn't give me the slip without singing."

"Don't you have any misgivings as to that," I said smiling. "But you had better terminate your interminable discussions first."

He laughed and the discussion began in earnest as soon as he had finished his frugal diet. The bill of fare consisted of a few grapes, an apple, and a cup of goat's milk. How could he work so incessantly on such a "bird's fare" as we call it in our Bengali locution!—I wondered.

It was evening already and Mahatmaji had just returned after a strenuous day of speeches, meetings, resolutions and what not. But the leaders had flocked to him from all parts of our vast peninsula and could ill afford to allow him a musical interlude so soon. It was, however, not an official gathering but an informal meeting in his bed-room. He was reclining on a huge *maidan* of a cot so peculiar to aristocratic India. As soon as the discussions began, he dismounted and sat on the floor in the midst of the other leaders among whom besides his host I noted such celebrities as Motilal Nehru, Kelkar, Jayakar, Azad, and Tulsi Goswami. The discussion was a lively one relieved by Gandhiji's usual humour and badinage and crowned with intermittent laughter of the responsible saint. For me the evening became memorable chiefly because I saw a new facet of Mahatmaji's fascinating personality with all its native wit, charm and resilience. I will never forget the peals of laughter that rang out at every sally of his. And how heartily he echoed these outbursts! Jawaharlal Nehru is right when he says in his autobiography that nobody has known Mahatmaji who hasn't known his laughter. I will give an instance or two by way of illustration.

* * *

He was clad as usual in a scanty strip of loin-cloth. The discussion centred chiefly around the boycot of foreign goods, different aspects of the cottage industry, plans for its nationwide extension, the success already achieved, the ways and means to push the Congress propaganda and diverse attendant speculation. Most of those present differed from him, as they all found it somewhat difficult wholeheartedly to acclaim his favourite homespun, his darling panacea for 'all the evils that flesh is heir to.' Each contributed his quota of grumbling and growling as Mahatmaji suggested a new move to bolster up his pathetic commodity, so cordially disliked by all. Almost every suggestion of his was, it is true, accepted in the end by the objectors themselves—Mahatmaji being one of the most irresistible advocates of lost causes—but in that informal gathering it was an uphill task even for him. For the best brains of India had assembled there vowed to convince him with their lack of conviction. But the frail athlete was imperturbable. His unruffled serenity, inexhaustible patience in hearing the others out, readiness to see their diverse viewpoints, meeting the same objection again and again to the end of time (don't we, Indians, have little faith in things that come to an end!)—all this was stupendous, to say the least. Add to this his promptness in taking jokes and flinging repartees, his breaking out in ripples of laughter whenever he had a chance, telling humorous anecdotes as apposite and varied as they were priceless, and last though by no means the least, his incredible tolerance for the views of his bitterest opponents—and you will get some idea of what Mahatma Gandhi can be like in important though informal debates. I feel tempted to paint the whole scene, but an instance or two must suffice.

A celebrity (who shall be nameless) with somewhat sombre whiskers blurted out in the midst of the hurly-burly that he simply loved to erupt into council-chambers in his coarse homespun.

"But why?" asked Mahatmaji with a merry twinkle.

"Because," said the whiskered stalwart, "the punctilious

Englishmen in the Council do not relish it and what delight on earth could rival that of spiting them?"

"Quite," echoed Mahatmaji, "and do you know whom you remind me of?—A dear friend of mine, who loved to assure me that he stalked into the British councils in *khaddar* to spite the British and into Congress conclaves in mill-made cloth to spite me."

The whiskered celebrity outguffawed everybody else.

I was reminded of D. L. Roy's famous comic song about our Westernisation:

Our tragedy is this, O friend,—
In spite of soaps which know no end
Our dark complexion will not mend
Through toilet day and night:
So back from England, furiously,
We start the Congress, and, curiously,
Our idols, the English we duteously
*Adore to rile in spite.**

Some hero-worshippers, however, are profoundly shocked by the faintest suggestion of irreverence against Mahatmas. "But Mahatmaji," started one of their brood, "that friend of yours couldn't possibly have meant to spite *you*."

"I know, my friend," said Mahatmaji with his merry twinkle, "but why grudge me the bliss of imagining it?"

The staid devotee was forced to smile as the others rollicked with laughter.

But Deshbandhu Das waxed animated. "In the name of all that is merciful, Mahatmaji," he supplicated, "do not goad us into madness over such insistence, please, specially about things that do not matter. Don't let us be ruined between—" glancing at Jayakar: "such obstinate Maharatta sticklers on the one hand, and—"

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* Translated from Bengali by D.K.R.

"The impossible Gujarati maniac on the other?" chimed in Mahatmaji.

The hilarity at such junctures is indescribable, but the point of such repartees loses something vital when they are put down on paper, torn from the background and setting of his magnetic personality. I well remember how —in the thick of this storm of laughter and persiflage— my thoughts had reverted again and again (perhaps for the human mind's love of antitheses?) to the great trial of this spare figure in 1921, when, about to be sentenced to six years of imprisonment, he calmly addressed the judge in a perroration which has made history:

> "I am here, therefore, to invite and submit to the highest penalty that can be inflicted upon me for what is a deliberate crime and what appears to me to be the highest duty of a citizen. The only course open to you, my Judge and Assessors, is either to resign your posts and thus dissociate yourselves from evil if you feel that the law you are called to administer is an evil and that in reality I am innocent, or to inflict on me the severest penalty if you believe that the system and the law you are assisting to administer are good for the people of this country and that my activity is therefore injurious to the public weal."

It was borne home to me in glimpses, that day, a magical side of his personality. For the leaders who were there that morning were anything but converts to Mahatmaji's darling recipe of the homespun. Not one gave him his heart's allegiance in the greater leader's projects for the promotion of khaddar. Yet in the thick of their stormings and fumings and revolts how the lonely, slight figure sat unperturbed, on the floor, a picture of unwavering faith in his manifestly hopeless prescription! For with how many of his countrymen could the impossible spinning wheel go down in our modern world? Yet this enigmatic anachronism fought for the primitive relic against odds that would have dismayed a Hannibal! And strangest of all, he won his way through, with what weapons God only knows. Not for nothing did the unrivalled barrister Das say that he had never in his twenty years of advocacy encountered a mightier advocate in a frailer frame.

* * *

That death too could be a boon I realised, suddenly, when the life of the discussion ebbed to its end—after what seemed an eternity! The leaders took their departure, one by one.

"Well?" he said, giving me a glance, at long last.

"But," I said hesitating, "aren't you tired after the battle of the *Kurukshetra?*"

"That is precisely why you have to play the flute of the heart-charmer," he parried.

I laughed, not ill-pleased, and sang a song of Kabir:

Whose heart is Rama's dear abode
What skills it if at all he pray,
And fast or nay?

Whose refuge is some pure saint's feet,
What skills it if the pilgrim's way,
Be his, or nay?

Whose soul is moved with love for all,
What skills it if he gives away,
His wealth or nay?

Whose thoughts the form of Rama fills,
What skills it if his lips should say,
His name or nay?

It was lovely to watch how music could touch a man who, but a little while ago, looked like a happy nomad in the desert of debates and discussions! Where, indeed, could lie hidden in him, the secret source of his unfading freshness?

"But today, Mahatmaji," I said after a pause, "it isn't music that brings me to you."

He looked at me quizzically.

"Oh, don't," I said. "It's only a letter I want to read out to you."

"Letter? From whom?"

"Well, you see, I had sent to Rolland a report of our conversation at the Poona Hospital. He commented at some length on your views on art. I felt you might be interested."

"Wouldn't I, indeed!" he said good-humouredly. "Please read it out. No, no—I am not at all too tired, I assure you."

I read out the following letter while he listened in a recumbent posture in his bed, interposing a few words of approval or comment here and there:

"Dear Dilip Kr. Roy—I thank you affectionately for your letter from Bombay. I thank you also for having spoken of me to Mahatma Gandhi in such kind terms. Your conversation with him is exceedingly interesting and I will probably publish a part of it (omitting the portion which refers to me) in a French review. It is indeed of great importance to know this aspect of the Mahatma's thought and you are the first to bring it out. But it is a pity that the Mahatma should have stopped dead when propounding his artistic *Credo*. For after the passage where he speaks so convincingly about gazing in adoration at the starry vault, one would have him add: 'But I do not on that account admire less the masterpieces of Indian painting and architecture.' He speaks merely of the star-studded sky. It is indubitably evident that Nature is the supreme artist. Only, one would have a personality like his supplement his apotheosis of Nature by some such remark as: 'But may men also take a leaf out of her book and create beautiful harmonious things in lines, colours, sounds and thoughts!" His conception seems to remain passive when confronted by Nature or the divine Principle immanent in her. If, however, God is in each of us, ought we not, according to our respective capacities, try to become the image of the Lord of Beauty?

"Reading between the lines of your interview it occurred to me that the Mahatma and his friends had somewhat taken amiss my observations on his ideas about art. I do not, however, remember having ventured to criticise him. But should I, inadvertently, have been guilty of any oversights in my book on him, and, unwittingly, caused him any vexation, none would regret it more than myself. A European is only too liable to error in appraising a great spirit of Asia even when his reverence and love for the latter are as sincere and deep-rooted as mine for the Mahatma. The only thing that, I think, I can safely claim for myself is that I have never had any *amour-propre* in my anxious endeavour to probe the depths of any living soul. I want only to have my errors pointed out to me, so that I may correct them. Now to your letter.

"You expressed a pained surprise that no European (neither an intellectual nor a statesman) should have betrayed the tiniest interest in India or in Mahatma Gandhi on the occasion of his being sentenced to six years' imprisonment in 1922. But do you know that none have contributed more to the misunderstanding of the Mahatma and his philosophy than the Indians themselves who have been in Europe? What with the attempts of those Indians who make out Gandhi to be a chimerical being with not a spark of practical intelligence, and what with a propaganda of those who make him out to be an obstinate Bolshevik who makes capital out of his doctrine of non-violence merely as a policy of expediency, the result has been that we stand marvelling between two such diametrically opposed theses. And that is not all. When some members of the International Feminine League for Peace and Freedom were mooting a demonstration of public protest against the incarceration of Gandhi, they received a very violently-worded letter signed by some Indian women who wanted to oppose the proposal tooth and nail. Their contention was that Gandhi had been essentially an apostle of violence all along the line. A mutilated passage from a speech of his was quoted, he was alleged to have said that India could gain her freedom only by wading through oceans of blood. They took good care to suppress his explanation to the effect that he had not meant the blood of adversaries but the personal sacrifice of millions of non-violent devotees. I cannot give you the names of these malevolent Indians, first because I have no right to, and secondly because I must not *bring down even on the heads of such miscreants the wrath of other Indians* (*besides, would not that be going against the wish and preaching of the Mahatma himself?*). You must not lose sight of the fact that it is only rarely that Europe gets a chance of being informed about India and Indians from men like you who combine regard for truth with love of their high heritage.

"When all is said, however, the injustices from which India suffers today are at best a sea in the oceans of abominable iniquities under which two-thirds of humanity are now groaning. Even in Europe the attempts at expression of sympathy by brave people are submerged. Their vision can hardly reach out beyond the horizon of immediate suffering with which they are encompassed. One should take count of all this and be a little charitable.

"For my part, my dear friend, I can assure you, in all sincerity, that I do not accord any preference to my country or to Europe above the rest of the world. I look upon every living being as a brother to me, his sufferings as well as his aspirations touch me closely. I search in vain for a great thought of another race to which I am fundamentally a stranger: I have never yet found a foreign clime: I feel at home everywhere. . . . The only marvel is that the vast majority, in Asia as well as in Europe, should fail to perceive this profound unity.

"For the fact remains that they do, which is, besides, the basic cause of the antipathy of my compatriots to myself. I appear to them in the light of an alien, really, because of my refusal to immure myself within the four walls of my provincial geography. It is the cause of a good part of my life's tragedies and sufferings."

Here I paused and said to Gandhiji how much Rolland had suffered at the hands of his compatriots. I gave him the gist of what he had written in his *Au-dessus de la Mêlée* which I quote below:

"Je me suis trouvé depuis un an bien riche en ennemis. Je tiens à leur dire ceci: ils peuvent me haïr, ils ne parviendront pas à m'apprendre la haine. Je n'ai pas affaire à eux. Ma tâche est de dire ce que je crois juste et humain. Que cela plaise ou cela irrite, cela ne me regarde plus. Je sais que les paroles dites font elles mêmes leur chemin. Je les sème dans la terre ensanglantée. J'ai confiance: la moisson lévera."

(During the last year I discovered I was fairly rich in enemies. I have to tell them only this: they may hate me, but they shall not succeed in teaching me to hate. I have nothing to do with them. My task is to say what I believe to be just and right. Whether it titillates or irritates concerns me no more. I know that words uttered make their own way. I sow them in the earth reeking with blood. I have confidence: the harvest will bear.)

Then I resumed:

"I only hope that my own sufferings will contribute their modest share to the future happiness of men by paving a little the path of their union and mutual understanding.

"Although you have already seen a good many of my articles on Gandhi, I send you my book on him. I must say it has been very widely read. Though the critics have been (as is their custom with regard to me) scrupulously silent about the author, the book has seen a number of editions and given a rude shaking to chauvinists and imperialists the world over.

"I have always had a great desire to go to your country. Neither the material difficulties nor my delicate health could have prevented me from visiting India; only I cannot leave my old father alone.

"I hope you are following your musical career as ever. Ne l'interrompez pas. Votre tâche est trop belle, et vous êtes designé pour la remplir. N'en laissez pas l'honneur à un autre.*

Au revoir, mon cher ami. If I do not write often, I write at great length when I do.

Je vous prie de croire à mes sentiments affectueux.

ROMAIN ROLLAND."

I then drew Mahatmaji's attention to the fact that his statement—"beside God's handiwork Man's fades into insignificance"—was likely, in spite of his qualifications, to produce an impression that he was against all arts.

Mahatmaji smiled.

"But when I spoke to you last," he said, "I did not want to suggest that arts were to be roundly condemned by all. Don't I know that people have different temperaments? I merely meant that so far as I was oncerned I had no need of arts like painting for my *own* inspiration. For I myself find enough satisfaction in the view of the starry vault. Perhaps Europe needs paintings to satisfy her. She hasn't our sky."

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* Do not discontinue it. Your task is too fine and you are cut out to accomplish it. Do not let anybody else have the honour.

"But surely you don't suggest that if she had, she would be just as indifferent to painting?"

"No. Her love for painting may, indeed, be due to other sources. I only wanted to impress on you the fact that I, personally, find paintings rather superfluous. That is why I keep the walls of my Asram bare. Besides, I cannot afford them."

"But it is your outlook on art I am concerned with, Mahatmaji. The point at issue is—supposing you could afford it, would you still exclude the paintings?"

"Well," said Mahatmaji with a smile, "if you are so sympathetically inquisitive about my personal tastes and necessities, I must repeat I am not keen about painting. By which I only mean I won't go out of my own way to own them—far less have others procure them for my walls."

"But then you see," he added with his kindly smile, "I am opposed to the walls even. How could one possibly care for trappings on one's walls, if one wanted all the time to get away from them? The walls seem to confine me, to restrict my liberty, to wean me from Nature. Do you follow?"

I nodded assent.

"Would you say it were better if all men gave up painting for Nature?" I said.

"That depends," returned Mahatmaji with his usual readiness, "I have told you that so far as I am concerned Nature suffices for me. But for others, if they are sincerely convinced that arts such as painting do any real good to humanity, so far so good. Only, let the artist guard against self-deception and self-love. Let him be always alive to his duty towards the masses. To the extent that his art benefits the masses, it is to be approved of. To the extent that it doesn't, it is to be discouraged."

"But what if the masses cannot appreciate his art here and now? A good many higher types of art require a certain education or cultural equipment, don't they?"

"What do you mean exactly?"

"Isn't there such a thing as specialization? Often enough high art cannot be appreciated by people who have not yet attained to a certain level of culture."

"I cannot quite see eye to eye with those who swear by specialisation. A real work of art should appeal to all."*

I was forcefully reminded of Tolstoy's famous utterance:

"As soon as the religious perception which already unconsciously directs the life of man is consciously acknowledged, then immediately and naturally the division of art, into art for the lower and art for the upper classes, will disappear. There will be one common, brotherly, universal art; and first, that art will naturally be rejected which transmits feelings incompatible with the religious perception of our time, feelings which do not unite, but divide man,—and then that insignificant, exclusive art will be rejected to which an importance is now attached to which it has no right."

"Why are you so much against specialisation?" I ventured after a brief pause.

"I would put to you a counter-question: Why are you so much against the universalisation of art, against helping it to derive its real inspiration from the virgin soil of popular response—in short, against vitalising art by the life-blood of humanity? Why don't you look the plain fact in the face that Nature, which must be the last inspiration of all real arts, never stints? She never specialises in a way so that only the cultured few may enjoy her bounties leaving the vast majority out in the cold. Why then do you want to make art the handmaid of a privileged few? Surely, it can be no part of true art's mission to confine its appeal to a select coterie, a handful of connoisseurs. Why must art lose touch with the life of the soil? I fail to see how you are going to reclaim art unless it were progressively stimulated by some widespread demand of the people. How would you save art if you didn't tend its roots by the sap of the soil which is the fount of life? Why make art into a sort of plaything for a small Upper House?"

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* When revising this Mahatmaji inserted this qualifying clause "a real work of art" instead of "a great art" in my report.

"But must not all great creations of beauty, like high flights of thought, be a little beyond the ambit of the majority's comprehension, at least for a long time to come? It is all very well to extol the life of the soil, the widespread response of the masses and so on, condemning that of the cultured cénacle. But tell me one thing frankly: do you really think that the masses could, here and now, respond to mankind's highest utterances or profoundest philosophies? Or perhaps you hold that it is different with philosophy?"

"I don't. For I maintain that the profoundest utterances of man in every great philosophy or religion as in every great art must appeal equally to all. I cannot for the life of me see much in any specialization which can mean nothing to the vast multitude. Its only tangible effect seems to be that it gives a swelled head to a few and breeds in them contempt for the majority where there should be sympathy and understanding for all. Can there be anything commendable in such a perverted tendency? Or do you suppose that an activity which makes only for division instead of unity could ever redound to the glory of our Creator? Rather than serve such a fine mission would it not be a thousand times better to do our best to alleviate the widespread misery of mankind, to come forward with the balm of sympathy and light of knowledge, to wipe the tears with which the earth is soaked from crust to centre?"

There was something so indefinably moving in the sincerity of his tone, the simplicity of his utterance, and the humility of his position, that I was again profoundly stirred in spite of myself, recalling his famous rejoinder to Tagore when the latter had charged him with not taking sufficient note of our precious heritage of art and culture in his extreme pre-occupation with human suffering only:

"True to his poetical instinct," Mahatmaji had retorted in a moved vision, "the poet lives for the morrow and would have us do likewise. He presents to our admiring gaze the beautiful picture of birds early in the morning singing hymns of praise as they soar into the sky. These birds had their day's food and soared with rested wings, in whose veins new blood had flown during the previous night. But I have had the pain of watching birds which for want of strength could not be coaxed even into a flutter of their wings. The human bird under the Indian sky gets up weaker than when he pretended to retire. For millions it is an eternal vigil or an eternal trance. It is an indescribably painful state which has to be experienced to be realised. I have found it impossible to soothe suffering patients with a song from Kabir. The hungry millions ask for one poem—invigorating food."

It was not for nothing that Tagore has said of him:

"The Mahatma has won the heart of India with his love; for that we have all acknowledged his sovereignty. He has given a vision of the *Shakti* of Truth; for that our gratitude to him is unbounded. We read about truth in books; we talk about it, but it is indeed a red-letter day when we see it face to face. Rare is the moment in many a long year when such a good fortune happens. We can make and break the Congress every other day. It is at any time possible for us to stump the country preaching politics in English. But the golden rod which can awaken our country to Truth and Love is not a thing which can be manufactured by the nearest goldsmith. To the wielder of that rod our profound salutation . . ."

I met Mahatmaji next in Ahmedabad. I was then staying as the guest of a dear friend, Ambalal Sarabhai, the renowned mill-owner and a favourite of Mahatmaji. In his delightful company I saw Mahatmaji at home in his native surroundings, in his celebrated Sabarmati Asram. I had the privilege of singing to him one evening in open air under the evening stars. All the inmates of the Asram joined him in his prayer that evening on the sands beside the river. After the recitation of a few couplets from the *Gita* I sang some devotional songs of Mirabai in the beautiful Gujerat atmosphere. I still remember Mahatmaji's kind slap on my shoulder as he asked me once more to call on him whenever I was to pass that way.

I remember a joke of my friend and host. He had taken me to his mill and then to Mahatmaji. He was appointed an examiner of students who were invited to write papers on the economic convenience of the spinning-wheel and yarn, etc., for the propagation of *khadi*.

"Shall I tell you, Gandhiji, about one examinee?" said Ambalal. "It's a great joke. He actually wrote that you were the greatest economist in India."

"And how did he fare at your hands?" asked Mahatmaji merrily.

"He got zero, of course," said my friend. And how Mahatmaji laughed!

In 1928 I joined the Yoga Asram of Sri Aurobindo, at Pondicherry. Eight years I lived in seclusion and then, in 1937, I went out for a visit to Calcutta where I came in contact with a delightful family. The father, Dharani Kumar Bose, an engineer, wanted me to take in hand his sixteen-year-old daughter, Uma, who was highly gifted musically. I was astonished by the rapid strides she made in singing as I taught her what I loved most: mystic and devotional songs. I wanted Mahatmaji to hear her, as I knew he would love her lovely tone, but Ahmedabad was, alas, a far cry from Calcutta.

I returned to the Asram after three months' stay in Bengal and then had to go again to Calcutta as I was invited by the Vice-Chancellor of the University to draft a syllabus for the music-students. It so happened that Mahatmaji had come to Calcutta just then in the month of March (1938). I lost no time and went to see him.

We met after twelve years. He greeted me with his old kind affection and child-like laughter.

"And what about music?" was almost the first thing he said.

"Command."

"After my evening prayer then?" he suggested, pointing to the ceiling to indicate that the generous terrace of his host, Sarat Chandra Bose, would be the venue of our meeting.

I went with Uma and her parents and a few friends. A big crowd had assembled on the lawn for a *darshan* of their beloved Mahatmaji. He had to appear and ask them to disperse. The gate-keepers experienced not a little difficulty in extricating us for admission from the besieging throng.

It was an impressive gathering of friends and admirers of Mahatmaji on the vast terrace, among whom I met my old friend, Jawaharlal. He greeted Uma cordially as he had liked her music very much at Allahabad a month ago.

Mahatmaji with his usual fascinating smile asked Uma to sing first.

An artist friend of mine accompanied her singing on the guitar. The result was indescribable. All were deeply moved by her voice which could be likened to the simile of a great Frenchman (describing the voice of a prima donna): "*Si le cristal pensait, il parlerait ainsi.*" (If the crystal thought it would speak thus.)

Next she sang a song on the soul of a nightingale, of which I first read out to Mahatmaji the following translation:

My soul of nightingale! on dreams of rose!
Wing to the wonderland of blue, where flows
The melody of star-flute's invitation:
"Forget thy cage for a domeless destination."

Hark! Light sings there in wistful love: "Home, home
Back to thy nest in daytides' ebb . . . O come!
Haste to the Friend so far, yet near and tender,
Pledged to thy song-heart's cry of self-surrender."

After the song a pundit read out from the *Gita* a few couplets, of which one was:

Dukheshwanudwignamanāh sukheshu wigatasprihah
Weetarāgabhayakrodhah sthitadheermuniruchyate."

He who is never affected by his pain,
Nor is athirst for fleeting earthly joys,
Who eludes the clutch of wrath and fears and vain
Attachments—such a sage has equipoise.

I will never forget how this couplet had moved us that evening under the star-sown tropical sky on the open terrace with Mahatmaji sitting before us in prayer and the beautiful voice of Uma weaving a magic aura of other-worldliness in the gathering shadows:

> *"Forget thy cage for a domeless destination . . ."*

* * *

I saw him next in Peshawar in picturesque surroundings. It happened like this: I had taken my sister and niece with Uma and her parents to Kashmir in October of the same year (1938). At that time Mahatmaji happened to be in Peshawar as the guest of the brave Frontier Gandhi, Abdul Gaffar Khan. So I wrote to him that we wished to visit Peshawar and that his 'Nightingale' too would be with us if he hadn't by now clean forgotten her and us all. He sent me a wire and wrote to me (17-10-1938):

"I may forget Uma, the Nightingale, though that seems improbable, but how could I forget *you* . . . ?"

Much heartened, we motored down from Srinagar to Peshawar, where we were the guests of Sri Prafulla Chaudhuri, famous in those parts for his regal hospitality. He and his charming wife Mira accompanied us to the village of Utmanzai, about twenty-five miles away. It took us an hour by car to reach the country cottage of Mahatmaji's disciple and host, the noblehearted Peshawar leader. I had long wanted to see this outstanding personality, the non-violent Muslim soldier, who had courted prison any number of times in response to his call. He is called by the frontier peasants "Bacha," derived from "Badsha" meaning the Emperor. Today he is truly an Emperor among the Pathans of Peshawar, which however does not stand in the way of his living like one of them and sharing with them their homely joys and sorrows from day to day. He is always ready to plunge into the fray, staking everything, whenever Mahatmaji sounds his bugle. He has never yet failed his great Hindu leader and Guru.

Mahatmaji gave us his rare smile, but we were sorely disappointed to learn that he had taken an austere vow of silence for the past two months. His secretary handed him a slip of paper and a pen.

"We feel so derelict, Mahatmaji," I said. "Oh, why again this unfortunate vow of silence?"

"Because," he wrote with a smile, "my silence is good for me and certainly good for everybody else."

"But tell me," I asked, "are you glad to see us, or sorry?"

He scribbled back in reply: "In the language of the Gita I should be neither glad nor sorry."

"But in the language of the heart?" I pursued, laughing.

His pen sped on: "The heart has no language, it speaks to the heart."

First I sang the song *Chakar rakho ji* with Uma who then sang Mira's famous *Suni mai Hari āwanki āwāz* which I have rendered somewhat freely thus:

I hear His footfalls ring.
I strain mine eyes . . . when will He come, my King?

Lo, peacocks flaunt their gorgeous plumes in glee,
Cuckoos, papiahas warble in ecstasy!
Blue showers fall and boom deep thunder-clouds,
Swift blades of lightning pierce their opaque shrouds!

Young in her gala garments Nature answers
With loveliness world's loveliest of dancers!
But Mira's heart to meet Him is on wings!
O come, delay no more, my King of kings!

Lastly, Uma sang a song on Krishna's flute to the dance-accompaniment of my niece Esha who had already, at the age of thirteen, become a disciple of Sri Aurobindo under whose inspiration she improvised her devotional dances with a rare mastery of feeling and execution. Here is a translation:

Hark, hark to His Flute of delight!
On the bank of Life's lone shadowy river
He plays to quell our Night!

Wreathed in sweet smiles, a vision of Gleam,
He is crowned with His aerial Love!
He dances, a beacon to derelict souls,
On earth star's kinship to prove!

When we made him our *pranam* he wrote on the sheet before him: "Do you want me to say many thanks? It looks so utterly ridiculous. But if you want the ridiculous, you may have them." All laughed out as his secretary read it out aloud. He joined heartily in the chorus. I asked him for the sheet of paper. He laughed out again as in simple glee he tossed it to me.

We laughed again.

As we motored back his crystal laughter kept ringing in my ear like a cadence that lingers:

Dark clouds will scowl and thunders boom:
Light laughs away the impending doom.

* * *

After 1938 I had no occasion to meet Mahatmaji for nearly a decade. But I liked to write to him from time to time as he invariably answered my letters in his characteristic vein—genial, transparent and informal. Now that he is no more I will append a few of his letters by way of sample. In one dated 8.4.34 he wrote:

"My dear Dilip,

I am surprised that you have not received my letter. I wrote to you almost immediately after hearing from you and it was a fairly long letter I sent you. Your book 'Anami' I did glance through but the best use, I thought, I could make of it was to send it to Mahadeo who knows Bengali and who is, besides, a poet. I am not. But that does not prevent me from reading whatever you write. What you told me about the activity there in your Ashram interested me deeply and the information that H— had become a changed man in Pondichery. I would like you to send me his poems. I hope you are keeping well and still singing. I often meet your pupils who sing to me and always remind me of the beautiful *bhajans** that you used to sing for me.

Yours sincerely, M. K. GANDHI"

In another dated 21.2.34 he wrote:

"Dear Dilip,

It was a great grief to me that though I was in Pondichery I was not able to see any of you. Ambalal Sarabhai gave me your letter of October only yesterday. It had gone with Bharati to Oxford. I wrote to you about your book when I received it. I hope you have got that letter. Do please write whenever you feel like writing. I am glad H— is there. Has he given up drink altogether?

Yours sincerely, M. K. GANDHI."

In 1936 I wrote to him asking him to comment if he could on some letters of Srimati Raihana Tyabji a mystic poet and composer and a devotee of Krishna. These letters with my replies I published later, along with the comments of Sri Aurobindo and Sri Krishnaprem. I wrote to Mahatmaji that as he too was a devotee of Krishna I hoped he would be interested in such discussions, especially as these were by no means of a merely academic interest for us, seekers. But for once I failed to draw him out for he wrote, in his reply, dated 17.6.36:

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* Devotional songs

"My dear Dilip,

Mahadeo sent me your letters and enclosures only yesterday. I glanced through the very interesting correspondence between you and Raihana. I have perhaps a theory of my own about Krishna. I need not discuss it here as it is of no consequence. My opinion, however, is that the publication of the correspondence will make confusion worse confounded. I hope, with you, that we should meet some day. Then one can usefully discuss the Krishna and many other things of common interest. And of course I should like once more to hear your music.

Love, M. K. GANDHI."

In another dated 17.6.45. he wrote:

"My dear Dilip,

Your letter is tempting. The recollection of your voice tempts me, but I must resist all temptation and keep to the strait and narrow path as conceived by me.

I would have written to you in Hindi as I do, generally, but I forbear for obvious reasons.

Love, BAPU."

I don't quite know what he meant by "obvious reasons," but it is probable that he had come to know of my opposition to Hindi as the *one* language for inter-provincial intercourse. I never concealed from him my dissidence whenever I happened to be out of sympathy with his views. I held that it would be a great disaster for India if Hindi replaced English in our schools and colleges. There were many who misrepresented to him the motives behind my candid criticism of his outlook on life and things, but he never changed towards me far less let such temperamental difference mar his kind affection for me with all my obvious limitations.

But the most interesting letter I ever received from him—and also the most revealing was in answer to a long letter of mine in which I conveyed to him my pained surprise—surprise because I felt that he was being blind to what was so obvious, and pain because it *was* painful to see him peter out as a political leader. In my letter I had suggested that since his political *mantras*—like the spinning-wheel, vicarious fasts etc.—had contributed more confusion than relief he might retire from politics for a while to practise Yoga (under a real Guru who had vision and knowledge) till he could see his way a little clearer. I humbly pointed out to him—what most people felt though few ventured to express—that he had come to give us a wrong lead in politics because it was not his métier, *swadharma:* his line was social service equipped as he was with all the great qualities that went to the make-up of a noble social reformer. I stressed his lack of real knowledge—*jnana*—of the Divine Reality and the vitiating movements of the human ego which were responsible for his signal failure as a true leader of the multitude. To illustrate what I meant I quoted the following passage from Sri Aurobindo's Synthesis of Yoga:

"In the world we act with the sense of egoism; we claim the universal forces that work in us as our own; we claim as the effect of our personal will, wisdom, force, virtue the selective, formative, progressive action of the Transcendent in this frame of mind, life and body. Enlightenment brings to us the knowledge that the ego is only an instrument; we begin to perceive and feel that these things are our own in the sense that they belong to our supreme and integral Self, one with the Transcendent, not to the instrumental ego. Our limitations and distortions are our contribution to the working; the true power in it is the Divine's. When the human ego realises that its will is a tool, its wisdom ignorance and childishness, its power an infant's groping, its virtue a pretentious impurity, and learns to trust itself to that which transcends it, that is its salvation." "Besides," I wrote, "why not turn whole-heartedly to *sannyas**—the real *sannyas* I mean—in order to achieve self-realisation since you beleive in 'asceticism' which you once described to me as the 'highest art'—remember? *Sannyas,* though not an ideal way for people of the activist temperament, did often help some who failed to see things in the proper perspective because of their constant activity which ends, so often, in becoming an obsession."

It was like him not to have resented the suggestion—surely not one of the least endearing traits of his character—and to reply in his usual tolerant way in a letter dated 16th July, 1934:

"My dear Dilip,

I have your letter and enclosures. The letter came into my hands only yesterday. It had gone first to Bombay and there by oversight remained with one of my helpers for some days.

"My difficulty is fundamental. I do not believe that my present activity is less conducive to self-realisation or merger in the Divine than abstention would be. *Sannyas* is not cessation of all physical activity. It means to me cessation of all activity, mental or physical, that is *selfish.*

* I used the word *sannyas* in the modified sense of quietism, not in the sense of complete cessation from all activity. For instance, Shankracharya or Vivekananda or Dayananda were *sannyasis* of this type, I pointed out.

If I could be convinced that cessation was the better way for me, I should adopt it at once.

Yours sincerely, M. K. GANDHI."

* * *

Although I travelled a great deal, somehow I never had an opportunity of meeting him again till it presented itself suddenly in 1947, and in this way:

When India won its long-sought freedom on the 15th of August, 1947—an especially momentous day for us as it coincided with Sri Aurobindo's birthday—I longed to have an opportunity of discussing with Gandhiji the significance of this remarkable coincidence. Of course *we* knew that it was no chance coincidence.* We knew that Sri Aurobindo had been working for India's political emancipation, sleeplessly, with his great occult powers. But people outside his aura were mostly sceptical of the reality of such powers. I felt that Gandhiji as a believer in mysticism was likely to understand something of such powers. For had he not, more than once, referred some seekers who had approached him for information about Yoga and occultism to Sri Aurobindo and had not he himself sought an interview with Sri Aurobindo in 1934? I wanted to see him also for another reason: I had composed the music for the famous song Vande Mataram but rumour had it that Pundit Jawaharlal was going to foist on us a lesser song as the "national song" of India. We had all taken this bitterly to heart and so I wanted to secure, if I could, Gandhiji's approval of this great song set to my new tune which could be easily sung in chorus. So I wired to him from Ahmedabad on October 27th 1947 requesting that he permit me to sing this song in my new tune at his prayer-meeting on the 28th evening. Our plane, however, reached Delhi just too late. So I rang him up and was given an appointment with him the next morning at Birla House where he was staying.

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* In the message which was broadcast from Trichinopoly by the All India Radio on his birthday in 1947 Sri Aurobindo had said: "August 15th is my own birthday and it is naturally gratifying to me that it should have assumed this vast significance. I take this coincidence, not as a fortuitous accident, but as the sanction and seal of the Divine Force that guides my steps on the work with which I began life, the beginning of its full fruition."

I was in a curious psychological state on that unforgettable morning. Nearly a decade had elapsed since our last meeting. I wondered if he would receive me as cordially as he used to of old. My heart misgave me because I no longer felt towards him as I had in the days gone by, and I knew that he knew of my changed outlook and orientation away from his own.

But the moment I saw him sitting there my fears were assuaged. He gave me his smile of welcome, the old, heart-warming smile which he knew how to use as a magician knows how to use his wand. I felt moved and forgot my ideological antagonism to much that he had lately been prescribing as infallible. I took a long look at him. He had indeed grown slightly older but he looked still as fresh and guileless as a full-blown rose. The same friendly interest in a friend and admirer, the same disarming laughter, the same glance of spontaneous trust and warm welcome!

A young lady was massaging his feet when I entered his living-room. He lay stretched on a mat. On seeing me he got up into a sitting position. I made him my obeisance in glad reverence and was a trifle surprised because not only could I find not a trace of constraint anywhere within me, but it almost seemed to me as if his unfortunate lead in politics of late were of very little importance! Also, he put me so utterly at my ease with a mere laugh that I felt as if there had been no hiatus of a decade since I had met him last; it was almost as though I had met him only yesterday. In fact I was more drawn than ever by his baffling personality, and that also in a new way. For I realised, as never before, what a magic power he had of getting under the skin of others to feel the pulse of things. To give an instance.

I said, in passing, that I was so grateful because he had revised my talks with him and authorised me to publish them in my book, "Among the Great," which had, as a result, made some impression in India and abroad. He assumed at once his old mock-solemn tone and answered in kind irony: "Do you insinuate that it was *my* giant frame which did the trick?" And he burst out laughing at his own joke or, shall I say, chuckled with almost a child-like glee. Although I knew well his ways I was taken unawares by his manner of using the verb 'insinuate.' I mumbled something helplessly and forgot all that I had rehearsed so carefully to break the ice. His eyes twinkled in evident amusement. But he went off at a tangent once again.

"Your book has made an impression," he said kindly, "because it has value—not because *I* figured in it."

This made me pull myself together and I made bold to counter it.

"But surely, Bapuji," I answered, "it's *you* who are play-acting at modesty now, not poor Dilip, since you can't be nearly so unmaginative as to be unaware that you are a theme that would glorify any tune."

"Wrong again," he parried, laughing. "For you made me into your pet theme to set your music to. You drew me out till I sang about music and art and asceticism and God knows what else, for it was long ago and I have clean forgotten."

We laughed out in chorus. That was Gandhiji all over, at once tempting and baffling one when one went out to take his measure. Unfortunately, however, the fates were against me this time and we could not continue in this care-free vein much longer since he had to go and see Lord Mountbatten to discuss about Kashmir. So I asked him whether I could sing the Vande Mataram and 'Hindusthan Hamara' that evening at the prayer-meeting. He smiled and said:

"Yes, I had your telegram from Ahmedabad. But you gave me no time to wire back; so I could not have it conveyed to you that I have made it a rule to have only *bhajans* sung at my prayer-meeting. And that's why," he added, to make light of it, "I was praying last evening at the prayer-meeting: 'O Ram, may Dilip not heave into sight *now* of all times." And he chuckled once more in merriment.

As I laughed with him I admired how cleverly he had baulked me even of my right to disappointment. I said: "I quite understand, Bapuji; but what about my singing them here?"

"Here?" he asked as his eyes held mine. "You mean, just now?"

I nodded. "It won't take more than ten minutes, I assure you."

His face brightened. "Oh then it will suit me to perfection," he said; then with a warning smile: "but there's one condition: you'll allow me to hear you while I lie stretched, for she hasn't finished massaging my feet yet."

"A bargain," I answered, laughing. And I sang the two songs. . . .

He listened with rapt attention which more than compensated me for all the pains I had taken to thrust myself on him. I felt very grateful to him for his warm response and was delighted when he said:

"Your voice has improved very much. It was always rich with deep overtones but today it has gained a new vibrancy of appeal—especially in the bass notes."

I flushed and tried hard, though in vain, to look modest (I suppose once a hero-worshipper always a hero-worshipper!) when he smiled very kindly at me and went on: "And you look the same as ever—not a day older since I saw you last ten years ago." Then he looked at his watch and added: "You'll come to the prayer-meeting this evening, won't you?"

"But haven't I prayed for that privilege already?"

"But that was for Vande Mataram. I want you to sing to me your beautiful *bhajans* there. I haven't heard them for a long time, remember."

"And I haven't inflicted myself on you for an equally long time, remember," I returned. And we both laughed.

As I returned home I caught myself wondering why he had made no comment on my tune of the Vande Mataram. Had he missed in it the true ring? I was a little chilled. Little did I realise how amply he was going to make amends the same evening!

* * *

I arrived at the prayer-meeting a few minutes before time. The gold of the setting sun lay tenderly on the green lawn. The rostrum stood at the end of the lawn remote from the house and I was given a seat near it a few yards from the microphone which Mahatmaji used while addressing the audience. This was daily broadcast by the Delhi Radio later the same evening at eight. I stood scanning the audience. I had never been to any of his prayer-meetings before and so I did not wish to miss anything if I could help it. Also I wanted to let the receptivity of the audience seep into me so as to deepen my own.

Women and children, numbering about two hundred squatted in the forefront. Then sat, pell-mell, a motley group: men, boys, youths, workmen, journalists, business men, soldiers and last, though not least, the dauntless crew, the curious, whom no science known to mortals or angels could ever segregate to render innocuous. At the far end hummed an equal number standing and turning now and again to stare at Mahatmaji's rooms ready to shout "*Gandhijiki jai*" at the first sign of his appearance.

Suddenly the audience got restless like waves visited by a chance gust. All eyes were focussed at once on the other end where we could see the frail giant emerge down a corridor, with a young lady on each side of him, on whose shoulders he leaned affectionately whenever he came to his prayer-meetings.

As he drew near everybody stood up in reverence. A hush suceeded the growing hum. When he approached me I made him my obeisance. He smiled radiantly. "So, you have come? I'm glad!"—his eyes spoke with their language of twinkles. As he took his seat on the rostrum I felt very tender towards him, the more as he coughed intermittently. I almost forgot that I had little in common with his post-war politico-religious ideology.

I mention this not to assert myself gratuitously but only to stress the strange magnetism of his incalculable personality which drew me to him in spite of myself in a way I found it difficult to account for. But at the same time I was conscious of vibrations in the air that made me feel a deep malaise. The reason was this. Some years ago somebody in our Asram had seen a prophetic vision which I had discussed previously with some of my dear friends whom it had equally alarmed. The vision was not concocted *after* the event: it had been published in the twenties in a well-known book entitled "Unapanchasi" whose author, a celebrated writer and a quondam disciple of Sri Aurobindo, is noted as a man of keen intellect and great integrity of character. For his patriotism he had escaped being hanged, in 1908, by the skin of his teeth and had to serve a sentence of twelve years as an exile in the Andamans. The vision he had recorded was that directly after the liberation of India from the foreign yoke a very eminent man in "white homespun" would be shot dead in a public meeting. As I heard his address I could not dismiss the vision. And it weighed on me still more on the second day—how and why, I will relate in due sequence. Let me now get through what happened on the first day.

After Gandhiji had taken his seat on the rostrum the two young ladies who had accompanied him recited verses from the Gita and the Quran. As they recited the Quran verses I could feel the air getting tenser. There were some who sat in front who, instantly, hung their heads. A few Sikhs glared and fidgeted. I wondered if any real good was being done through such procedure which the bulk of the audience, who were Hindus, not only resented openly as an insult but abhorred as an abomination. However, to proceed.

When the recitation was over the two ladies sang a *bhajan* together. Then Mahatmaji gave me a meaning look and I sang a famous *bhajan* of Kavir of which I give below the English translation:

Nor fires devour nor tempests swamp
Nor robbers hurt that devotee
Who in the Lord's inviolate Grace
Is havened everlastingly.

For this saviour boon of boons implored Him
Men like gods, who won His Light:
Blessed are they on earth who reach
His Midnight Sun beyond the Night.

Ponder, O King, the irony:
Thine is vain-glory's carnival,
While Kavir's is the immortal bliss
Of tramping with the Lord of All!

Then Mahatmaji proved once more, for the millionth time, that he was, if anything, even more unpredictable than a comet in flight. For he began, to my delight, by commenting on the singer instead of the song. As I heard the speech: once more broadcast by the Delhi Radio the same evening I feel my report will be fairly trustworthy. This is how he started:*

"You have heard a very sweet song. But you ought to know something about the singer. His name is Dilip Kumar Roy. I met him first, years ago, in the Sassoon Hospital at Poona where I was convalescing after an operation for appendicitis. He then sang two *bhajans* accompanying himself on a *tambura*. This morning, too, he sang to me two famous national songs: the 'Vande Mataram' and 'Hindusthan Hamara' set to his own music. I liked them very much specially the first one whose music, I felt, was very fitting to the spirit of the noble anthem. He has, as the saying goes, retired from the worldly life to practise Yoga at the feet of his great Guru, Rishi Aurobindo to whose Asram he, and many others besides, have dedicated all they had in order to follow the gospel of their Guru. You should know that at Sri Aurobindo Asram there is no distinction of caste or creed, race or religion. I heard this from the lips of no less a man than the late Sir Akbar Hydari who told me that he used to go there every year as on a pilgrimage. Naturally Dilip Kumar is a chip of the old block, having no prejudices, religious or sectarian. And though I am no connoisseur of music, I may, I think, make bold to claim that very few persons in India—or rather in the world—have a voice like his, so rich and sweet and intense. And today his voice struck me as having grown even sweeter and richer than before. But I want now to draw your attention to the message of his song which you would do well to ponder deeply. For the song emphasises that the wealthy may possess everything on earth—wealth, glory, pomp and equipage—and yet remain intrinsically poorer than the pauper who has his all in all in and through possessing God whom we only call by different names to be able to quarrel with one another fanatically. If you will all take a leaf out of this Book of Supreme wisdom you will be able, by dint of brotherhood, to shed all prejudices that must mar the harmony of peace and universal happiness."

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* The gist of this speech was given in all the papers next day.

He then went on to dwell at some length on the fratricidal war that was being waged in Kashmir and wound up with: "Let us all lay to our hearts the refrain of the *bhajan* which has been sung just now: that we all derive from one God who presides in us all, no matter by what name we choose to worship Him."

When, after the meeting, I conveyed to him my grateful appreciation, he beamed on me with his lovely smile and said: "You'll come tomorrow, won't you?"

"Well, Bapuji, I'd love to, you know," I faltered out, "but—er—it's like this: I have already booked a seat in a plane and my friends expect me at Lucknow tomorrow afternoon."

"That's a pity," he said, ruefully, "for I wanted to hear you sing the song *'ham aise deshake vasi'* which you taught Sucheta Kripalani."

That decided me. "How can one refuse *you?*" I laughed.

"That's the stuff to give to the likes of us," he returned at once as we all laughed out in chorus with him.

I had to stay in Delhi nearly a week.

The stenographer who took down his discourses daily called on me next morning and told me that when he had submitted to him his report the previous night Mahatmaji had reprimanded him for having written "Sri Aurobindo" instead of "Rishi Aurobindo" and then personally inserted the epithet "Rishi" before the Sage's name. This, naturally, made a deep impression on me and I wondered how I might best convey to him my deep gratitude. I cancelled my visit to Lucknow.

Next evening I arrived at the Birla House a good quarter of an hour before time. The audience was even more impressive than on the evening of my first visit but the atmosphere was disquieting. I was told that someone had registered an objection to Quran verses being inflicted on a predominantly Hindu audience and so it was on the cards that Gandhiji might not be holding the prayer at all. They pointed out to me the trouble-maker: it was a Sikh stalwart with white beard and sombre face. As I fixed him with my gaze, he looked up and our eyes met. Instantly he hoisted himself out of his seat and almost ran up to me in a breathless state.

"Sir!" he roared angrily. "You are a *sadhu* and so must adjudicate. I appeal to you on bended knees to be fair. Tell me, is it right, can it be right, to foist on us, Hindus, verses from the scriptures of those who have massacred us ruthlessly, desecrated our homes, outraged our women —yes, *sadhuji*, who are not men but monsters, I say. Won't it be a slur on our honour and our manhood to have to listen after all this to this abomination—"

I restrained him in the middle of his fiery speech.

"But be quiet, my kind sir," I demurred, "for after having come here you shouldn't—"

"But why shouldn't I?" he flashed back. "I came here to hear Mahatmaji, not Quran verses."

"But you knew he insists on reading the Quran verses. So the better course for you would have been to stay away since you feel as you do. In any case do sit down and let him come. It's for *him* to adjudicate, for it's *his* meeting, not mine." Then placing my hand on his shoulder I added: "You'll at least hear me sing the name of God, won't you?"

"I'd love to provided you didn't bring in the Muslim God."

I couldn't help but laugh and answered: "But there's only one God, you know."

"I do," he returned, "but countless Satans—whom *they* worship, you know."

"Calm yourself, my friend," I replied helplessly; then I asked him to take his seat adding that I was going to sing of Krishna.

His face brightened. "Splendid!" he cried. "And I'll listen the whole night, for *He* is an authentic God." And he went back to his seat. It was not a moment too soon: Gandhiji had just emerged into view flanked by the two ladies. We all rose.

I knew Mahatmaji wanted me to sing the *bhajan.* *"Ham aise deshake vasi."* But as I looked down from the rostrum on the gathering I wondered whether any good purpose would be served by singing such a song in such an atmosphere of pent grievance. I could clearly see the excited face of the Sikh who had violently objected to the Quran verses and it was obvious to all but the wilfully blind that he was but a mouthpiece of the bulk of the audience many of whom had suffered so grievously and that with an ineradicable feeling of despair that Mahatmaji was a friend of the Muslims and not of the Hindus. And seeing it so clearly (probably because I lived far away from the turbid atmosphere of the work-a-day world, the political world of feuds and strifes and irremediable misunderstandings) I could not but feel that it was worse than useless to attempt what was exceedingly difficult—the reconciling of irreconcilables—by a means which almost guaranteed failure. Anyone who could feel the pulse of the country knew—which the news-papers tried desperately to hide—that the Hindus had been growing restive all over India. Also I wondered how Mahatmaji could have lost sight of this simple fact that where love was intense it turned into hatred almost overnight when frustrated or thwarted. It was evident that those who had come to hear him loved him but that was precisely why they all felt so bitter against him for having let them down for no reason *they* could discover! So I decided it would be folly to sing *"ham aise deshake vasi"* in such an atmosphere of rankling hatred. For the song spoke exultantly of the Promised Land of bliss and love beyond the dualities—a veritable Nature's cornucopia which to the destitute must sound like cruel mockery. So I decided on another which, I thought, would be more acceptable to the audience as well as suitable to the occasion, especially as it invoked the name of Krishna. Here is the translation:*

House in thy soul the flickerless lamp of love;
O way-lost dupe, relume the angel flame
In the wistful temple of dream: nurse in faith's grove
The memorial rose of peace no thorn may shame.

Delivered from thy passions' lurid gleams
And shadowing greeds, foes in the guise of friends,
Know: in the deep of hush the soul redeems:
She is the vanguard morn to darkness sends.

Her children in gloom, thy Motherland mourns and sighs,
Play Beauty's flute like Krishna: thou art He.
If thou wilt wake—the world, a-quiver, shall rise
And mitred priests of love sing on with thee.

Hate never pays, though sorrows purify;
Be poised in thy Self of love—incarnate, free.

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* From the Hindi song of the Poet Abul Hafiz Jalandhari.

If love resign who shall reveal the sky?
Soul's night is doom: her dawn—sure victory.

Be pledged to noble ways of the ancient Sun;
If lose thou must, let it be life—not love.
Shall clouds besiege thy star-dominion?
"Up! time is fleeting!"—the bugle calls above!

But as I sang the fourth verse I could not keep back a deep upsurge of sadness: it was not through such preachings and sermonisings that the world was likely to be regenerated. How to stave off the inevitable: love resigning? How could a creature like man win through here and now to citizenship of the Promised Land who—to quote from Sri Aurobindo's epic, the Savitri—was still but

> *"A link between the demi-god and the beast,*
> *He knows not his own greatness nor his aim;*
> *He has forgotten why he has come and whence;*
> *His spirit and his members are at war;*
> *His heights break off too low to reach the skies,*
> *His mass is buried in the animal mire."*

And above all who

> *"Would guide the world, himself he cannot guide,*
> *He would save his soul, his life he cannot save."*

But above all, a sense of darkness crept upon me relentlessly which made me decide to close my eyes till I partially succeeded in putting myself into the song—in the third verse in particular—improvising on the flute of Krishna regenerating the unhappy world. When I opened my eyes I saw the eyes of the Sikh glistening with unshed tears as he lifted them to mine. But to proceed.

Gandhiji spoke once more but in a sadder tone, dropping his voice occasionally when it dwindled down to a whisper which even the microphone failed to amplify into audibility. He said:

"You have heard again a beautiful *bhajan*. But although its tune is simple, the trained voice of the gifted singer has imported into it a sweetness all his own. The message of the song has it that the true devotee's inner being should be converted into a veritable temple where the object of adoration should be love of all as incarnations of the Divine. This is necessary for not till the heart is finally purified can come to us the vision which reveals the One in all and all in the One. So it is of the most urgent importance that you remind yourselves that till your minds and hearts have achieved this purity nothing can be really achieved since not till then will our souls have become so many temples where true worship can be offered to the Supreme."

The meeting broke up and I walked slowly in line with Mahatmaji with a crowd following us. The old Sikh overtook me and made me his obeisance and thanked Mahatmaji warmly. He gave him a long look but it was a sad look he bestowed. When those in attendance on Mahatmaji shook off the others he halted and turned to me. "But you didn't sing *that* song," he said in a tone of gentle reproach.

"Surely you know why I didn't?" I answered. He only nodded; I went on apologetically: "I thought the one I sang was a more apposite song in the circumstances."

He lifted his eyebrows in his characteristic way.

"And didn't I drive its message home?" he laughed. Then as we moved on, he added: "In one sense I am glad you didn't sing it this evening. In another I am sorry because you may be set on flying to Lucknow to-morrow."

I hastened to reassure him: "But I have cancelled my Lucknow trip."

He gave a chuckle. "Do you know I wished fervently that this might happen?"

"And how could anything *not* happen in our country which you wish to happen?"

He dropped his eyes and said: "How I wish what you say in irony were true!"

I apologised once more: "I only meant, Bapuji, that your wanting to hear me sing again did the trick. For after that I felt I simply couldn't leave before singing once more to you—the more because," I added, "I couldn't leave without having expressed to you my deep gratitude for having referred to Sri Aurobindo and his Ashram with such appreciative reverence; and I must thank you especially for having gone out of your way to pay your homage to one who is a glory to India and is still so often grievously misunderstood."

He appraised me for a few seconds, his eyes raining kindness, then answered: "But how could I have done otherwise—not to give one so great his bare due?" He laughed and blessed me as I made him my parting deep bow. I experienced an exaltation, and yet I felt a profound sadness . . . The vision recurred to me again and again . . . relentlessly.

* * *

When I arrived at the prayer-meeting next evening I met my old Sikh friend who came up almost running, his face glowing with enthusiasm.

"But tell me," I said, waving his compliments aside, "you will behave tonight, won't you?"

"I promise, Sadhuji . . . what songs. . . ."

But I was unimpressed. For as he went on I became absent-minded and wondered whether it wasn't merely wishful thinking. For did music really help? Wasn't human nature in the mass too deeply infected with the virus of the ego to be appreciably healed by such superficial nostrums?—

"The light his soul has brought his mind has lost;
All he has learned is soon again in doubt;
A sun to him seems the shadow of his thoughts,
Then all is shadow again and nothing is true . . ." *

If this be so, I brooded, why must I sing what I was going to sing tonight:

The land where lies our home of homes
Is a land of blooms without a thorn:
Fear's grisly forests grow no more,
Pain's harvest there is never borne.

Love's rivulet ripples blue and long,
Creation is a thrilled delight,
Heaven's vision there redeems the earth
And Time flows timeless day and night.

There every prayer is self-fulfilled,
None bargains when he gives away,
There life is fashioned in moulds of Truth
And none is pawned in maya's play.

Outlawed are selfish clamours there,
Exiled the sense of thine and mine,
No owner rules, no slave obeys,
Nor heat dogs ever the Light Divine.

'Tis not a poet's fairy tale,
This world of blissful fantasy:
It waits in every heart to be won,
Our last incredible victory.

But I had to sing it all the same when, after the prayer, Gandhiji made me a sign. While I sang, my sadness gave place little by little to resignation if not joy. But the respite was brief, for the tides of my melancholy drowned my exaltation as soon as I came to the end of my song. Gandhiji must have surmised it, somehow, for he did not give me his usual look of greeting after the song. This made me sadder still as I had a feeling that with all his brave attempt to hide it he was weary to the bones . . . world-weary and . . . longing for sleep. Wasn't that the deeper reason why he had such a rooted predilection for such a 'fairy tale' song? Do what I would, I attended no longer to what he said while commenting on the song. So I can but quote it here from a press report of his address:*

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* From Savitri—Book III, Canto IV—Sri Aurobindo.

"The prayer, therefore went on as usual. Sri Dilip Kumar Roy sang the *bhajan,* whose first line, Gandhiji said, meant that the devotees belonged to the land where there was neither misery nor sorrow. Gandhiji explained that in his opinion it had a double meaning. The one was that they belonged to a country—that is, India—in which there was neither misery nor sorrow. He could not recall a time when there was neither misery nor sorrow in India. The first meaning, therefore, was an aspiration of the poet. The second meaning had reference to the soul and the body which was its abode. Thus the soul inhabited a body which was, in the language of the *Gita,* the abode of true religion and not the abode of fleeting passions. The condition attached to the success of the pursuit was that the owner of the abode was free from the six noted enemies whose names were anger, malice, greed, passion etc. The blissful state was capable of attainment by everyone. And if that happened on any appreciable scale, the poet's dream about India would be quickly realised . . ."

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* Printed subsequently in "Delhi Diary" . . . pp. 127-28.

After the meeting I made him my last obeisance on the lawn. He looked at me tenderly with his gentle sad eyes and said:

"It was good, that song."

"I know you had a special liking for the song."

He sighed. "When do I hear you next? Tomorrow?"

"I regret, Bapuji," I said apologetically, "but you have detained me for nearly a week. I must fly tomorrow for Calcutta."

He smiled. "Well, well! If you must, you must and there's an end of it. But I will miss you tomorrow evening at my prayer-meeting."

When I left him, my eyes were moist with tears. I was moved by him as never before. And though I tried hard, I could not shake off the suggestion that I would never see him again. But although this thought made me feel more for him, I knew it had nothing to do with the overwhelming impression he had made on my mind, and the fact that I could not account for my being swept off my feet in spite of myself only added to the sum total impression he had left on me. For I could not truthfully deny that I was irrevocably out of sympathy all along the line with his political lead during the last few unhappy years of his life and that I had gone out of my way to visit him with a definite motive. I remembered also that I had done so rather conscience-stricken lest paying him a personal homage at the present time—and particularly at his prayer meeting—betoken a kind of insincerity. Furthermore, I feared to catch the contagion of his political ideology. Nevertheless had he not charmed away my gnawing sense of guilt by a mere touch of his magic personality and even put me under a deeper debt by being kinder to one who was finding it difficult not to judge him harder with time? He was too sensitive by nature not to have missed my spontaneous ardour of old and yet here he was lavishing generously his abiding affection on one who had definitely grown recalcitrant! This was indeed somewhat of a startling experience for a born egoist like myself and it made me see him in an entirely new light as it were which not only enhanced the value of his personality in my eyes but made me feel a profound sympathy with his growing sense of frustration and inner isolation accruing from his deepening disenchantment. No wonder he loved the fairy tale song despite his inability to see in it any gospel save that of an individual if not fortuitous salvation. As I reclined musing in the aeroplane I recaptured as in a clear vision his frail figure. I saw his face, lonely and wistful, caught the echo of his laughter fraught with pain, and as I visualised him thus from a new perspective, a unique line of the great Bhavabhuti recurred again and again to my mind: "Bajradapi kathorani mriduni kusumadapi":

"Harder than the trump of doom
Yet softer than an opening bloom!"

* * *

I was invited by the post-graduate students of the Calcutta University to give a lecture-demonstration under the aegis of the Vice Chancellor. The subject was: "Points of Contact between Indian and Western melodies." The date: January 30, 1948. I had just sung a German Wiegenlied of Curschmann:

So schlaf' in Ruh! so schlaf' in Ruh!
Die Sterne leuchten hell und klar.
Es kommt von dort der Engel-schar
Die Äuglen zu,
Mein Kindlein du!
Nun schlaf' und schlaf' und schlaf' in Ruh!

I then proceeded to describe how close in spirit this melody was to the plaintive and other-worldly vein so grateful to the Indian soul when, suddenly the news came, a bolt from the blue, that Gandhiji had just been shot dead in Delhi by a Hindu. The meeting was dissolved and a boy went hysterical. Gloom descended on us all.

On my way back home I was struck by a coincidence: the song I had composed and was going to sing was a mystic duologue between Mother and Child:

"I will now sleep in thy love's deep
And toy no more with things that pall.
I have at last heard thy far call:
Without thy dream naught will redeem
Nor hearts sing like a waterfall."

"O come to me: I'll croon for thee
My coral cadenced lullaby
And heal thine ail with rain of sky.
For thee I wait at Heaven's gate
For which I made thee pine and cry."

"I never knew—thou wouldst endue
My life of dust wth thy star-shine
And shower thy boons, O Mother mine!
I only cried when none replied
And deemed remote thy Grace Divine."

"But I knew still what thou must will,
And so I lingered day and night
To help the home—my way-lost sprite!
When darks now loom thou cleave the gloom,
O hail!—reclaim thy deep birth-right!"

I had fever that night and heard myself singing again and again in my dream:

When darks now loom thou cleave the gloom,
O hail!—reclaim thy deep birth-right . . .
Deep birth-right . . . deep birth-right . . .

BERTRAND RUSSELL

BERTRAND RUSSELL

IT WAS in Cambridge that we first contacted the limpid crystalline thought of Bertrand Russell—in 1920. His vision of a new world had fired the imagination of most of us:

"At present respect is secured by wealth; in a society where wealth was unobtainable and poverty not to be feared, less material standards would prevail . . . In such an atmosphere, art might revive and science might cease to be prostituted to commerce and war. The human spirit, free at last from its immemorial bondage to material cares, might display fully for the first time all the splendour of which it is capable. Life might be happy for all and intoxicatingly glorious for the best."

Or again: "The world that we must seek is a world in which the creative spirit is alive, in which life is an adventure of joy and hope, based rather upon the impulse to construct than upon the desire to retain what we possess or to seize what is possessed by others. It must be a world in which affection has free play, in which love has been purged of the instinct for domination, in which cruelty and envy have been dispelled by happiness and the unfettered development of all the instincts that build up life and fill it with mental delights. Such a world is possible: it waits only for men to wish to create it."

It sounds so unreal today . . . so outlandish, in the brief span of but a couple of decades! Yet in these days of totalitarianism and organized butchery utterly cynical of all human values, we may still fortify our hearts with his prophetic words:

"Meantime the world in which we exist has other aims. But it will pass away, burnt up in the fire of its own hot passions; and from its ashes will spring a new and younger world, full of fresh hope, with the light of morning in its eyes!"

Many young men and women of Europe still regard Bertrand Russell as a prophet, and eminent men like Havelock Ellis or Laski or Joad, always looked upon him as one of the most suggestive thinkers of the West. To some of us, Indians, he appealed chiefly as a singer of Love minus its illusions, Strength minus its callousness and Reason minus its cold irreverence.

Which is not to say, however, that Russell was an easy man for us to accept. His is a complex nature. Now he will laugh at mysticism, and the next moment thrill to a strange beauty or pain in things like an authentic mystic as exemplified in his *Freeman's Worship or Questions.* Or again he will speak tenderly of the Old World and in the same breath expect America to save it from decadence with her robust science and organisation. A few years ago he wrote in an article: "I incline to think that the invention of machinery is a misfortune to mankind," and then asserted: "but when once machinery exists, it cannot be kept out of any country which is suited to it from the point of view of physical geography. I have the greatest sympathy with Gandhi's attempt to prevent the industrialisation of India: if it were possible for him to succeed I would support him. But I am persuaded that success is quite impossible. The spread of industrialism is like a force of nature: we must accept it and make the best of it." * This only indicates that his mind is not only too wide-awake to accept current slogans and dogmas, but also too sincere to ignore truth even when it goes against his own outlook on life. That is why even when he cannot help admiring the Occident as the parent of science he falls in love with the Orient and hopes "that China, in return for our scientific knowledge, may give us something of her large tolerance and contemplative peace of mind."* Everyone knows how unpopular he is in Russia because, though a staunch advocate of certain trends of socialism, he revolted long ago against her totalitarian methods of establishing communism. He is a sceptic and yet a believer.

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* *Future Cultural Relations of the East and West. . . . The New Orient—Russell.*

I remember a relevant anecdote which Tagore related to me years ago in Calcutta. "I was in Cambridge then and Russell took me out for a morning stroll," he told me. "We were passing by a Catholic Church where a choir was singing. I suggested going in to hear the beautiful hymns. 'No, thank you,' he replied. 'The hymns and incense and coloured glasses make me confess to feelings my intellect does not approve; I want to keep my mental sky clear of the mystic clouds.' "

Will Durant of America has attempted an appraisement of Russell which is worth quoting: "The world has convinced Bertrand Russell that it is too big for his formulae, and perhaps too large to move very rapidly towards his heart's desire. And there are so many hearts and so many different desires. One finds him now an older and a wiser man, mellowed by time and a varied life; as wide-awake as ever to all the ills that flesh is heir to and yet matured into the moderation that knows the difficulties of social change. All in all, a very lovable man: capable of the profoundest metaphysics and the subtlest mathematics and yet speaking always simply, with the clarity which comes only to those who are sincere; a man addicted to fields of thought that usually dry up the springs of feeling, and yet warmed and illumined with pity, full of an almost mystic tenderness for mankind. Not a courtier, but surely a scholar and a gentleman, and a better Christian than some who mouth the word."

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* *The Problem of China*. . . . Chapter XI—*Russell.*

True. And that is why he wins even when he loses, because of this fundamental warm sincerity of his which prefers even defeats through love to victories through ruthless power. And also because he is a poet too, a poet of love and faith even when he declaims in the language of dispassionate logic. Who but an authentic poet of compassion could write:

"United with his fellow-men by the strongest of all ties, the tie of a common doom, the free man finds that a new vision is with him always, shedding over every daily task the light of love. The life of Man is a long march through the night, surrounded by invisible foes, tortured by weariness and pain, towards a goal that few can hope to reach, and where none may tarry long. One by one, as they march, our comrades vanish from our sight, seized by the silent orders of omnipotent Death. Very brief is the time in which we can help them, in which their happiness or misery is decided. Be it ours to shed sunshine on their path, to lighten their sorrows by the balm of sympathy, to give them the pure joy of a never-tiring affection, to strengthen failing courage, to instil faith in the hours of despair. Let us not weigh in grudging scales their merits and demerits, but let us think only of their need—of the sorrows, the difficulties, perhaps the blindnesses, that make the misery of their lives; let us remember that they are fellow-sufferers in the same darkness, actors in the same tragedy with ourselves. And so, when their day is over, when their good and their evil have become eternal by the immortality of the past, be it ours to feel that, where they suffered, where they failed, no deed of ours was the cause; but wherever a spark of the divine fire kindled in their hearts, we were ready with encouragement, with sympathy, with brave words in which high courage glowed."

Such was the man I longed to meet even though I could never take his worship of science too seriously. Years later, when I had imbibed just a little of the wisdom of Sri Aurobindo through Yoga I was glad to realise that I had not been mistaken in my appraisement of Russell, not having judged him by his mental beliefs and expressed views which, at best, reflect but a superficial aspect of one's personality. Sri Aurobindo once wrote to me in a letter: "To me the ultimate value of a man is to be measured not by what he says, nor even by what he does, but by what he becomes." But, while in England, I had only vaguely intuited the poet and the lover in the seeming logician, because it was not his love of science that had stirred me to my depths but his love of sympathy and beauty founded on a large charity of the heart. So when the Women's International League for peace sent me an invitation to their Conference at Lugano, I accepted it with alacrity because it had been announced that Russell was coming to deliver a course of lectures on China. They had asked me to give a lecture-demonstration of our Indian music. I wrote back that I would gladly comply.

So I sped from Germany to Switzerland with a singing heart. I will not describe my joy when there, on a bright morning, I met him for the first time, in August 1922. We stopped at the same hotel for three days conversing at table and elsewhere on diverse topics. After his departure I wrote to him a long letter inviting his opinion and advice on the question that sorely troubled me at the time: whether music should not be looked upon as a somewhat selfish and aloof activity in a dependent country like India, where the vast majority sweated under the yoke of a foreign rule. I referred him to Rolland's views on Tolstoy's inveighings against art, etc., as well as my reactions thereto.

Russell wrote back (dated 18-10-1922—London):

Dear Mr. Roy,

Of course I remember you very well at Lugano . . . I will do my best to answer your question which is one that has often and anxiously occupied my thoughts.

On the balance, if I were in your position I think I should devote my life to music, and give to politics only so much time as is compatible with that. I do not believe that people can, in the long run, be useful if they thwart their nature too much. I have observed often that the sacrifice of some strong fundamental impulse to a cause tends to make people fanatical and ruthless, so that in the end they do more harm than good. One may expect to prove oneself an exception, but that is rash. For myself I have adopted a compromise: I give about half my time to speaking and writing on practical affairs, and about half to the abstract pursuits that my nature loves.

Then you might look at the matter another way. Assume that, with the course of time, India achieves her freedom; you would wish that there should be people in India capable of producing a fine civilization. This will not be the case if those with capacity for things other than politics have meanwhile neglected their gifts.

At bottom the question depends upon the strength of your own impulse. If your love of music is the strongest thing in your life, you should follow it. But if you feel that politics could so absorb you as to make you forget all about music, the matter is otherwise. No one but yourself can answer this question. I can only suggest how one should act in the event of either answer.

The considerations you set forth in your letter are all such as should be taken into account, but on the balance my feeling is what I have expressed in this letter.

Then I returned to India and corresponded with him and asked him personal questions about his own philosophy, which he answered with his characteristic kindness and lucidity. In 1927 I went to Europe a second time on a musical tour and wrote to him to his London address. He had just left for Cornwall where he had bought a lovely rural cottage (at Porthcurno) on a beautiful site where he invited me to come and see him.

There I had the privilege of spending three most delightful days with him and Mrs. Dora Russell. I kept a daily record of our conversations which I sent to him a fortnight later from London (along with the report of a conversation of mine with Tagore) asking for his permission to publish it. He very kindly gave me this permission and wrote (12-7-27):

Dear Mr. Roy,

Thank you for sending the report of our talks and the very interesting account of Tagore. I have gone through your report and erased a few things I don't want to say publicly, and corrected the language here and there. Your visit was a great pleasure . . .

Yours very sincerely,

BERTRAND RUSSELL

These conversations I present in the following pages.

* * *

I was to lunch with Russell at one on the first day. As I knocked, he opened the door himself and showed me into his study with his usual expansive smile of welcome. We were deep in conversation almost at once.

"When are you going to America, Mr. Russell?" I asked as I took a seat in front of him.

"In September," he replied with a smile, "that was why I had to hurry a little in selling off my London house."

"But why sell it off? Don't you like London?"

"No. I hope I shall never again live there. As a matter of fact ever since my return from China, I have been spending six months every year in this country-house. Besides, London is bad for the children too."

"But why are you going to America?"

"Because I want to make money. You see I am going to start a school for children in Peterfield, and for that money is necessary."

"In your book on Education you praised a certain school of one Miss McMillan. Do you propose to start this school of yours on similar lines?"

"Yes, it is a very good school for children, I think, but it is intended mostly for poor folk."

"And yours?"

"Mine is meant, well, for the middle classes—that is, for those who can pay for their children's education."

"Do you think that schools should be run separately like that?"

"I don't. But generally an elementary school is such an expensive undertaking that only the State can hope to tackle it sucessfully. A private person who is not rich cannot afford such a big expenditure."

"Why? Don't you think such a school can be self-supporting?"

"Not if it is meant for the poor. So it comes to a paradox really: if one isn't rich, one has to start a school for the rich."

He laughed. I joined in.

"But can't a school for the poor be run except with the help of the State? Supposing you succeed in winning over some rich people?"

"Ah, but there's the rub," he smiled, "if you want the rich men to come out with their donations, they will want to impose their own conditions, won't they? That is to say, they will insist on having their way in the regulation of the educational policy and won't that be disastrous?"

"Why? They might want sensible things too."

"No. What the rich will want shall always be bad, you can depend upon it," he said, prophetically.

We laughed.

"Besides, why should the rich people come out with their obliging funds when I never oblige them by standing up for their insensitiveness and heartlessness?" he added smiling. There was a tinge of bitterness in his smile.

I said: "Mr. Wells, too, in his latest book *Undying Fire* has emphasised the difficulties an educational reformer must encounter in a school run by rich men. They always keep poking their noses into the scheme for education, he says, with the result that no substantial reform can be achieved."

"Yes, I have seen that book, and he is quite right. So I fear it will be idle, for a long time to come, to expect any but lip-sympathy from the rich in this connection. The only practicable way of effecting such reforms is therefore to stir up public opinion sufficiently to force the State to take up the advanced schools in the teeth of the opposition from the idle rich."

"You don't seem to have any excessive faith in the goodness of human nature, Mr. Russell," I observed smiling. "I remember having read a cynical remark of yours in your *Problem of China* that 'human nature in the mass does as much good as it must and as much evil as it dares.' "

"I had said human nature in nations, hadn't I?" he asked smiling.

"No, you had said 'human nature in the mass,' I think." *

He smiled.

"But if you have no faith in the goodness of human nature," I asked, "then what is the earthly use of your advocating stable reforms in remoulding and remodelling people's character by education?"

"Well, I don't think that human nature is either good or bad, really. Man has to be egoistic, like all animals, for the sake of his self-preservation. He has therefore to hedge himself in with certain formulas or safeguards which are likely to stand him in good stead. Hence, if you can offer reform-schemes which do not run counter to those formulas you may just be able to get a few things done."

At this time the lunch bell rang.

Mr. Russell led me into the dining room. As we sat down at the table, Mrs. Dora Russell came in.

Their son, John, aged five, sat next to me. Mr. Russell introduced me.

"He is an Indian gentleman, Johnnie."

The boy looked at me with deep misgivings.

"Do you know anything about India?" I asked my little friend.

"Oh, yes. I have got a feather in my head, see, like a Red Indian."

"But that's in America, Johnnie," corrected his father. "Mr. Roy doesn't come from there."

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* I was of course quoting from memory. Here is what he had actually written. "They (the Chinese) have not yet grasped that man's morals in the mass are the same everywhere. They do as much harm as they dare, as much good as they must."—(Chapter IV, *The Problem of China.*)

"But, why, the Red Indians shouldn't be in America, they should be in India!" John objected with his father's logic.

We laughed at his evident discomfiture.

"Yes, that's rather puzzling, I admit," Mr. Russell conceded, "but then Mr. Roy isn't quite red, is he? So how can he be a red Indian?"

"Then I'll be a Red Indian," he said, casting logic away and then declared darkly: "I will put on that wicked dark coat of mine and kill him."

"Children are not exactly pacifists, Mr. Roy," pleaded Mr. Russell laughing. "You see, combativeness is so ingrained in our blood."

"But cannot pacifism be made just as ingrained in the child by careful inculcation?"

"Well, it is difficult," he answered. "You see, pacifism is too sophisticated a growth—and a much too recent one at that—to be able to appeal to an unsophisticated child. So success in such a matter cannot come in a day."

"He wasn't so militaristic before," said Mrs. Russell to me later on when we had moved into the drawing room, "but, you see, we had a Bolshiviat boy at our house recently—a son of Mr. Rosengolz, the Russian Foreign *Chargé d'affaires,* and he preached militarism from morning till night to our John, his first initiate."

"So that juvenile guest of yours got the better of your mature pacifism?" I asked, amused.

"For the time being anyway," nodded Mr. Russell. "Didn't I tell you just now that fighting was ingrained in our blood?" *

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* Speaking about militant patriotism Russell says in *Why Men Love War*: "Being itself in essence religious, like the impulses that lead to martyrdom, it (the passionate devotion to the Nation) can only be adequately combated by a wider religion, extending the boundaries of one's country to all mankind. But by this extension it loses the support and reinforcement of the primitive gregarious instinct underlying patriotism, and thus becomes, except in a few

"But why don't you forbid him to cherish such propensities from now on?" I asked.

"Well, you see, it is like this," he answered. "If you forbid things to a child, it is ten to one you will defeat your end. For he will then be almost certain to be all the more attracted by it. A forbidden fruit always has more charm, don't you know?"

"You mean then that there is no help for it?" I said, laughing.

"The best way in such cases is to let the propensities work themselves out, I think," he replied.

Mrs. Russell went out for a walk with the children. Mr. Russell told her we would join them, later, on the beach.

When we were alone, I asked: "What do you think of England's late rupture of diplomatic relations with Russia following close upon the heel of the Arcos raid?"

"I think it is mad."

"Do you think Russia's recent activities in China have something to do with it?"

"Undoubtedly. And we might be on the brink of a war with Russia at the present moment were it not for the fact that France doesn't quite want a war just now."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you see, England is continually inciting Poland to a fresh war with Russia. But Poland has always looked up to France as her guardian-angel, and France isn't particularly keen just now on a first class war with Russia."

"Your prophecy in your *Prospects of Industrial Civilization* that the next great war is going to be waged between the East, with Russia as its champion and the West,

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men gifted with an exceptional power of love, a very pale and thin feeling compared to the devotion that leads a man to face death willingly on the battlefield. It is this fact, more than any other, which causes the difficulties of pacifism" . . . . *Justice in War-time.*

with America as its champion may not be so very improbable after all. For see, how Russia is helping China now."

"Quite. And I think Russia would help India too. At least it is the only great nation that has any interest in doing so."

"With what motive?"

"Why, to undermine us, of course. Surely there is no love lost between modern Bolshevik Imperialism and British Imperialism."

"But you don't mean to say that the Bolsheviks are really imperialistic? If they are forced to fight, at least their pugnacity seems to be inspired by some definite ideals, don't you think?"

"For that matter every imperialism is inspired by definite ideals," he said caustically. "Are we, Britishers, any behind-hand in making out such claims even when our imperialism leads us to commit the worst atrocities in your country?"

"No, but surely, Mr. Russell, you can't put *your* imperialism under the same category as that of Russia. For surely Russia is idealistic and is bound to influence the world of the future more than your so-called ideals of British Imperialism. Hasn't communism a real message today?"

"Well, I admit Russia is going to influence the world in the near future. In their exposure of religion or in their crying down the Church for example—and in many other things, besides, they are today the vanguard of progress in the West. But a real communism, I must say, has failed there—for the time being, anyway."

"It may have—now. But don't you think that when they will have trained the next generation of boys and girls, the new citizens may change the face of the world?"

"I wonder," said Mr. Russell thoughtfully. "You see it is like this: whenever you inculcate overdoses of some doctrine in boys and girls, they grow up to react against those very doctrines. Christianity, for example, painted in glowing colours the charms of submissiveness, didn't she?—And look at the result in Europe."

"If you really mean to say that the inculcation of definite views and beliefs can never influence our actions, then what hope can there be in your educational projects?"

"Well, there are certain beliefs which do influence. Christian beliefs have been operative in the stiffening of the absurd divorce laws as well as prejudices against birth-control, but have not made pacifists of us exactly, have they? The fact of the matter is that only such beliefs happen to influence our actions as are unquestionably bad."

We laughed, and started out for a walk.

As we came out of the house, I asked: "Do I take you to mean, Mr. Russell, that beliefs don't influence conduct?"

"Well, you see, our belief as well as conduct is mostly the result of temperament.* That is, we act in certain ways mostly because our impulses propel us in that direction according to our respective temperaments. At the same time this temperament induces us to formulate certain beliefs to justify those acts. So beliefs are in general not the mainspring of our actions, really."

"Does it imply that if our beliefs were changed, our actions wouldn't change much?"

"No—our actions would usually change, too. Because

* It is rather interesting to compare with these views those of Sri Aurobindo in his *Superman*, "It is doubtful," he writes, "whether belief in Fate or Freewill makes such a difference to temperament and inner being. The man who makes belief in Fate an excuse for his quiescence would find some other pretext if this were lacking. . . . It is not our intellectual ideas that govern our action, but our nature and temperament, not *dhi* (intellect in terms of vedic psychology) but *mati* (the general mentality) or even *mannyu* (the temperament or emotive mind).

our beliefs are immensely modified by our circumstances and changed circumstances will change both beliefs and actions." *

"But don't you think that some of the noblest of men and finest of personalities have been the products of religious beliefs or mystic beliefs, if you will?"

"Well, I think that the finest of men are equal, if not greater in number, among the irreligious. When, of course, the majority of men in any country are religious, a greater number of fine men are bound to be religious, by pure mathematical rules of probability." He smiled. "But that isn't because it is religion which has produced the fine men; on the contrary, I should think. For, on the whole, religion has rendered the world definitely unhappier than it would otherwise have been."

"What about religious mystics who preached some of the loftiest of principles from their mystical illuminations and ecstasies? Or perhaps you don't believe them at all?" I asked.

"Well, I believe in ecstasies as data of definite experience, but when they imply vision of the highest reality I cannot accept them; for, the lofty principles you speak about are by no means the results of these mystic illuminations. As a matter of fact such ecstasies render the mystics distinctly self-centred and selfish."

"Selfish! How?"

"Because through such mystic transports they become more and more subjective and get more and more loath to lead a healthy life of varied activities and lose interest in things for themselves. Consequently, their joys tend to become more and more similar to the joys of the voluptuary or the drunkard."

"You don't say so, Mr. Russell!" I exclaimed.

"I do, really, for I see no reason why the religious mys-

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* These two sentences were inserted by Mr. Russell when revising this report.

tics should not be placed under the category of drunkards rather than prophets."

"But think of the sacrifices they make for their joys, the sufferings they cheerfully accept for their goal . . ."

"So does the drunkard. He undergoes a great deal of hardship too—doesn't he?—often throwing his hard-earned money away and making himself and his dearest friends and relatives suffer."

"What would you say of Buddha, then?" I said, trying to laugh.

"Well, his enemies said that he lived on the alms of the pious—which was rather an easy life too, wasn't it? But yet I must confess I like him better than all the other religious figures in the world put together."

I was agreeably surprised.

"Would you prefer him to Christ?"

"Any day.* I am convinced that Christ has done far more harm than good to mankind."

"But he gave so much beauty to life!" I discussed.

"Only to take away more beauty from it," said Russell with emphasis. "It was he who injected Judaism into a Hellenistic world, which I think was a great pity."

"Are you a great admirer of Hellenistic culture?"

"Well, not a great one exactly," he said. "It would be truer to say I admire many things in the civilization of the Greeks. I am very thankful, for instance, that they invented geometry."

"I quite understand your gratitude for that," I said smiling, "knowing your lively admiration of science."

"Yes," he nodded approvingly. "I do hold science to be a great achievement of man, very great indeed. I would go so far as to say that if scientists had their way a little more—as I earnestly hope they are going to have in the near future—we might well expect them to change the face of humanity in the course of a few decades—I mean, even with the amount of knowledge they possess today."

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* "I cannot myself feel that either in this matter of wisdom or in the matter of virtue Christ stands quite as high as some other people known to history. I think I should put Buddha and Socrates above him in these respects."—Russell's Lecture on *Why I Am Not A Christian.*

"For instance?"

"Well, to take a small one: it has been found that about ten per cent. of the men today are definitely feeble-minded. If scientists had their way, those persons could easily be prevented by artificial sterilization from breeding. That would mean a substantial alleviation of the misery of men here and now, wouldn't it?"

I was silent, being unable to share his enthusiasm for science.

"It is only a small instance after all of what science could do," he went on merrily, mistaking my silence for implied acquiescence. "For the more you come to think of it, the more you see the wonderful potentialities of science.

"In what way?" I asked, lukewarmly.

Russell thought for a little.

"Suppose," he said looking at me, "scientists were given a free hand today in the matter of improving the present breed of humanity. Well, they could so order life that even with the means and knowledge we have at our disposal today, they could prevent, here and now, all but the desirable and brilliant types of men from procreating. That would improve the breed of the next generation very substantially, wouldn't it?"

"How do you mean, Mr. Russell?" I said, distressed. "Do you mean to tell me that they would allow only a handful of choice men to be fathers?"

"Well, would that be such a great tragedy, provided we were allowed as much sex as we liked? I mean, the scientists would not prevent the mass of men from having sex naturally, but they would stand no nonsense from, say, hysterical mothers and sentimental fathers who are definitely unfit to perpetuate the species. Women would not be allowed to do without contraceptives except when they and the selected fathers were pronounced to be fit eugenically. The unfit must take proper measures for birth-control when they have intercourse.

"Of course, it won't be quite so simple in practice," he added, "for it is a complicated business. I have cited this only as a crude instance of the immense power of science to show how it can bring about far-reaching reforms here and now."

I must pause here to point out that Russell is not nearly so one-sided as such views taken in isolation might lead us to think. In talks one often overstresses certain aspects of a topic to the exclusion of others in order to be effective. Such statements cannot therefore do duty for well-thought-out cogently-argued expositions of one's mature views and opinions. Russell is too sincere and far-seeing a thinker to make a fetish of science leaving the boons of mysticism completely out of the picture. I will quote just a few cogent passages to substantiate this.

"No civilization worthy of the name," he writes in an article entitled *The Scientific Society,* "can be merely scientific. Scientific technique is concerned with the mechanism of life: it can prevent evils, but cannot create positive goods. It can diminish illness, but cannot tell a man what he shall do with health; it can cure poverty, but cannot tell a man how he shall spend wealth; it can prevent war, but cannot tell a man what form of adventure or heroism he is to put in its place. Science considered as the pursuit of knowledge is something different from scientific technique, and deserves a high place among the ends of life, but among these it is only one of several. At least equal to it are the creation and enjoyment of beauty, the joy of life and human affection. A scientific society which did not promote these things could not be considered positively excellent, even if it were to eliminate much of the pain and misery from which mankind has hitherto suffered."

"When we reflect upon the size and antiquity of the stellar universe," he writes in his latest book *Power*, "the controversies on this rather insignificant planet lose some of their importance, and the acerbity of our disputes seems a trifle ridiculous. And when we are liberated by this negative emotion, we are able to realize more fully, through music or poetry, through history or science, through beauty or through pain, that the really valuable things in human life are individual, not such things as happen on a battlefield or in the clash of politics or in the regimented march of masses of men towards an externally imposed goal. The organized life of the community is necessary, but it is necessary as a mechanism, not something to be valued on its own account. What is of most value in human life is more analogous to what all the great religious teachers have spoken of."

Lastly, a few remarkable passages from his admirable book, his latest, *Authority and the Individual:*

"Religious and moral innovators have had an immense effect upon human life, not always, it must be confessed, the effect that they intended, but nevertheless on the whole profoundly beneficial. . . . In a totalitarian State such events as the rise of Buddhism or Christianity are scarcely possible, and not even by the greatest heroism can a moral reformer acquire any influence whatever . . . What I am trying to convey, although it is not dependent upon any theological belief, is in close harmony with Christian ethics . . . All great religious leaders, and also all great artists and intellectual discoverers, have shown a sense of moral compulsion to fulfil their creative impulses, and a sense of moral exaltation when they have done so."

We stood on the top of a cliff overlooking a noble panorama of the sea with its flowering foam. He gazed long at the wide expanse.

"I love the sea more than anything else in the world," he said. "It reminds me of Confucius who said that men of virtue love the mountains and men of learning love the sea. I don't know what he based his observation on.

"I imagine he loved both," he added laughing. I joined. "I am afraid I have very little claim to virtue, according to Confucius," he laughed again.

We climbed down to the edge of the water. It was so tempting with the silver-flecked ripples. But I did not have the courage to plunge in as it was freezing cold.

Mr. Russell, however, went out swimming in great joy like a child. I remembered a remark of his a little while ago: "It is a sign of health to take interest in things for themselves. If one is mystically religious one doesn't: that is another objection of mine to religious people. For they are bound to lose touch with life through their self-centred isolation. That tends to make life uninteresting."

"But," I had said, "how can you persuade people who love religious ecstasies that their lives are less interesting than yours?"

"There's no way once their habits are formed and they have taken refuge under the hard crusts of dogmas. But when one takes children in hand one may do a lot by encouraging in them the proper sort of impulses which comprise the whole of life instead of cramping them into dwarfed and bigoted ego-centrics. For, you see, the habits acquired in early childhood die hard. That is why I am for ruling mysticism out of juvenile education. Children should be taught to enlarge their interests in life as much as possible."

While Mr. Russell swam, I sat on the sands near Mrs.

Russell who was perched on a boulder. We talked casually about a lot of things. Incidentally I said to her:

"In your *Hypatia,* Mrs. Russell, you have remarked that the difference between the nature of man and woman is much less fundamental than it is claimed. But I wonder if that is quite true. For don't you think that women need love in a sense more fundamental than men?"

"I don't think so. I admit that up till now women have had scarcely anything but love and motherhood to look forward to—as they have been all along debarred from taking an interest in masculine activities. But it does not follow that given opportunities and training they may not take as keenly to life and thought and other disinterested activities." *

"Don't you think that they want children more than men since a woman, generally, takes so keenly to child-bearing and rearing?"

"I don't think the facts of today tend to bear out what you say. For I find daily that the modern women who don't want children are gaining fast in number. It is to me even disconcerting, sometimes."

"But isn't this due more to the fact that most women have their health shattered owing to their having to bear too many children at short intervals?"

"There is much in that," Mrs. Russell conceded. "I have seen among the poorer classes that a mother often doesn't know what a good night's rest or a period of fine health is. So much so that they come to forget what joy of life means. Therefore, as often as not, they come to hate children. Otherwise, I think, most women could be pronounced to be fond of them if they had only one or two. Not till then can women be found to have leisure to take much interest in the many outside activities that are healthy and good."

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* Cf. "It is now becoming increasingly evident that there is no special sexual psychology of woman. That was a notion originated by ascetics and monks, though it has taken a long time to fall into discredit. Differences there are and always must be. So long as men and women are not alike in body they cannot be alike in spirit. But these differences on the psychological side are not of substance."
Chapter VII, *Psychology of Sex*—Havelock Ellis.

She discussed among other things the advisability of birth-control, repudiating as absurd the idea that sex without children must be sinful.

Mr. Russell now joined us again. He went and sat on a boulder next to Mrs. Russell.

"I would hate the very sight of a child if my husband wanted me to bear one every year," she said.

"I wonder," I said, "why people should be so opposed to birth-control when they see and often feel pained to see their wives' health shattered by too frequent conceptions."

I told her about a relation of mine who shattered his wife's health thus—in spite of the doctors' advice. And yet he was looked upon by all as a worthy member of society!

"You see," said Mr. Russell animatedly, "we have to thank religion for that too. That is why I said that religion is one of the most heartless means of making people miserable and helping many to pass for respectable men who would otherwise be ostracized as criminals."

"Do you really mean this?"

"I do, indeed. For, don't you see that a man, who makes his wife bear him a child every year and ruins her health, is nothing short of a most heartless criminal?"

"But doesn't he suffer too? Didn't my relation?"

"No. Even if he protested he did, I would tell him to his face that he is either a liar or a hypocrite. For the plain fact is that he simply forces his wife to be miserable and in shattered health for the gratification of his own sexual craving. And it is religion which stands by him in his brutality simply because he conforms to its sleek hypocritical codes of morality and senseless dogmas."

"But does sexual craving mean that he doesn't love his wife or feel for her?"

"He loves only himself. It can be easily proved. Suppose society were to legislate that if this relation of yours made his wife bear a single child to the certain detriment of her health, he would be put to death by slow torture, do you think he would go on forcing his wife to bear children year after year?"

I was silent.

"But you see, what he does, in effect, is to condemn her to death by slow torture, isn't it? And how does he achieve it with impunity in a society of human beings? Simply because religion continues to applaud him and he thinks self-complacently that birth-control is sinful."

"But I wonder if religion is the real culprit in such cases. Maybe superstitious religion is, but surely, true religion isn't. Tagore, for instance, is not opposed to birth-control, yet he is anything but an atheist."

"Ah! But Tagore doesn't belong to any communal or religious institution like most dogmatic religious people. For religion cannot do so much harm after all so long as its views are not promulgated or put in force through some sort of social organisation.* So long as religion remains a personal affair, it doesn't so much matter to society in general. For then it cannot do much harm."

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* Cf. the views of Sri Aurobindo in his *Psychology of Social Development*: "A church is an organised religious community and religion, if anything in the world, ought to be subjective, for its very reason for existence—where it is not merely an ethical creed with a supernatural authority—is to find and realise the soul. Yet religious history has been almost entirely, except in the time of the founders and their immediate successors, an insistence on things objective, rites, ceremonies, authority, church, governments, dogmas, forms of belief. Witness the whole external religious history of Europe, that strange sacrilegious tragi-comedy of discords, sanguinary disputations, 'religious' wars, persecutions, State-churches and all else, all that is the very negation of the spiritual life."

"But can it never do any good?" I asked.

"No, religion can never do any good—that much is certain," said Mr. Russell with mock gravity.

We all laughed. We reverted then to the topic of children and women.

"If women were consulted," said Mrs. Russell, "they would bear children only when the conditions were favourable and adopt contraceptives when they were not. That would leave their interest in children also unimpaired. I have borne two children and I think I will bear another later."

"But do you know what my mother said, Bertrand?" she added, turning to Mr. Russell. "When I told her that I wanted to bear another child, she said: 'Don't be a fool, Dora. I have borne four children—because I was one.' "

"She said that—did she?" he said and burst out laughing.

"But I think two should be the optimum number in these days," said Mrs. Russell as our laughter subsided.

"No, Dora, statistics would have us bear 2.4 children per couple," put in Mr. Russell with a merry twinkle, "though it is somewhat difficult to manage." We all laughed out again.

"It is strange that Mahatma Gandhi should be opposed to birth-control on principle," I said after a while.

"Gandhi would be, of course; he is very religious, don't you see?" he said. "Only, I should like to ask such religious Indian nationalists as oppose birth-control and prolong the slavery of women, whether they aim at a free community or a slavish one. For a community which makes slaves of women can hardly complain if the British makes slaves of them. For when we oppress those who are in our power we cannot very well grumble if the powers that be treat us in the same way, can we?"

"Let's go back, Bertrand," said Mrs. Russell looking at the sun. "We are already late for tea."

I asked Mr. Russell on our way back if he intended coming to India in the near future.

"I fear not," he said. "For I have just taken up the responsibility of starting that new school, you see. So I don't think it will be possible for me to go to India for a long time to come, much as I should like to."

"But why would you like to come?" I asked. "A little while ago you remarked that the mentality of India today is similar to that of Europe in the Middle Ages. Is it to see the medieval age face to face?"

"You may put it that way too. But I like also seeing things for myself, to have a feel about India which I cannot have unless I go there. But I have been a little discouraged about some features of modern India, by some of the beliefs I have run across in Indian students at Cambridge and Oxford."

"Yes, I know their narrow nationalism cannot overplease you."

"It isn't even their nationalism I mind so much—though, personally, I would sooner die than preach patriotism—it is their standing up for old traditions. For, I have seen that old traditions generally are bad everywhere and there is no reason to think that they should be otherwise in India."

"I understand Gandhi repudiated the invitation of Bolshevik Russia because she was atheistic?" he added as we discussed prospects of India's freedom in the near future. "I think India would be too foolish to act on such lines. It is senseless to say that she cannot possibly work with atheists. For only atheist Russia has now any interest in helping India."

"But do you really think Russia would help?"

"I do. For Russia has today a real interest in championing Asia against the West. Look at China. Isn't she helping her? . . . But," he added reflectively after a short pause, "I don't think it can materialise overnight. No, I hardly think it will be possible for India in peace-time to avail herself fully of Russia's help."

"When then?"

"There is certain to be another big war. And then India might see her chance when England will be busily engaged. But I don't think India will be able to free herself before that time comes."

June 27th.

Next day I was having lunch at my hotel when Mr. Russell called. We sat down together.

"I'll tell you something amusing, Mr. Russell," I said. "An English lady—a London neighbour of mine who is interested in Indian philosophy—has just warned me against you."

"What sort of a lady is she?" Mr. Russell laughed. "Not a Theosophist, I hope? This country is full of them, you know."

"I can't say. All I know is that she is a spiritualist. She took me to a place where they take spirit-photographs."

"Yes, but trained investigators going there see through it all."

"But all the same I cannot help feeling, there *is* something in it."

"Oh yes, I quite believe that there is *something* in it. But not as *much* as they make out. At any rate, no conclusive evidence has yet been adduced proving the survival of consciousness after death.

"I'll tell you a funny story," he added. "A spiritualist once wrote to me pompously that if I would like a convincing answer to any question in the universe, he was ready to help me with his wonderful trance messages. So I put to him a question on energy. His spirits were of course facile and glib and obliging as usual with their cryptic rigmaroles. I wrote back saying that whatever his spirits might be proficient in, physics wasn't their strong point. It cut him to the quick." And he laughed.

"But don't you really believe that our consciousness survives after death in some form or other?"

"I find no evidence to that effect."

"But neither is there any evidence to the contrary," I urged.

"I admit that. But to believe in such things when there is no evidence in their favour is what I should call irrational and essentially very much on a par with the belief of a man who will obstinately hold that the horse he has backed is going to win. For there is at least as much probability of its losing."

"But do you seriously maintain that all such beautiful organizations and achievements, as have been rendered possible only by the progressive mobilization of our energies could dissolve in a vast senseless futility?"

"Why not? A football team achieves wonderful things. But it dissolves nevertheless."

"But since there is no definite proof that our consciousness dies with the death of the body," I persisted, "as Tennyson so beautifully puts it: 'Nothing worthy proving can be proven, nor yet disproven—' why not 'cleave ever to the sunnier side of doubt'?"

"There isn't absolute proof, but I think the probability lies in that direction. For, up till now, the mind has not been found to work distinct from the body. So one may reasonably look upon it as a function of the body."

"What about telepathy?"

"Well, it may very well be physical—like wireless telegraphy—only our present knowledge hasn't yet got at the medium through which telepathy works. That is all. So I don't see how we can maintain that there is any evidence at all to warrant our assertion that we live for ever."

"Besides," he added after a short pause as we were going down a ridge, "I don't know that I would care to live for ever."

"Why?" I asked, somewhat taken aback, "don't you like life?"

"Well, it depends. Sometimes I do, at others, I don't. It is like eating. When you haven't had your fill, you smile on food, don't you? But when you are surfeited you feel a deep aversion. But all this is really irrelevant. What is important to remember is that there is absolutely no evidence in favour of our assumption that the scheme of things takes the least notice of our likes and dislikes, desires and aversions. So I feel it is more courageous and manly to try to look at life and its phenomena dispassionately." *

"For," he added, "the little real advance that we have made up till now, in so far as our comprehension of life and nature is concerned, has been achieved by looking life and things straight in the face—that is, objectively. So the chances are that this way of thinking will bring us nearer to greater and deeper truths—if anything can."

"That is another reason why I find fault with re-

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* "Philosophic contemplation does not, in its widest survey, divide the universe into two hostile camps—friends and foes, helpful and hostile, good and bad—it views the whole impartially. Philosophic contemplation, when it is unalloyed, does not aim at proving that the rest of the universe is akin to man. All acquisition of knowledge is enlargement of the self, but this enlargement is best attained when it is not directly sought. It is obtained when the desire for knowledge alone is operative, by a study which does not wish in advance that its objects should have this or that character."

—*Problems of Philosophy*: Russell.

ligion," he continued thoughtfully, "for I see that religion has taught us assiduously to look at life just the other way about, with the result that man, today, is very much the worse for it."

"You mean we were better off formerly when there was no religion?" I asked, surprised.

"I do—in certain respects. It is like this. The savage took a greater interest in his family and tribe and nature, not bothering much whether or not nature was kindly disposed to his personal wishes and aspirations. It is religion which has taught him to care only about himself—to be indifferent to others. This has made him all the more egoistic and exclusive." *

"But surely you are talking here of the men of lesser stature among mystics: take Buddha, for instance. *He* didn't preach egoism, did he?"

"I told you the only religious figure whom I have really liked is Buddha," he returned. "As a matter of fact, I find there is hardly anything I object to in *him* personally, as distinct from what his disciples painted him to have been."

"What about reincarnation? Didn't Buddha preach that?" I contended.

"Not he, his followers have done that in his name," parried Mr. Russell readily. "For didn't he smile derisively at the point of death when they prayed for his survival and subsequent resurrection?"

(*) Cf. Sri Aurobindo's (from a letter to me): "All religions are a little off colour now—the need of a larger opening of the soul into the Light is being felt, an opening through which the expanding human mind and heart can follow." As for the mystics being exclusive, here is a mystic's outlook: "But even if our personal deliverance is complete, still there is the suffering of others, the world-travail which the great of soul cannot regard with indifference; there is a unity with all beings which something within us feels and the deliverance of others must be felt as intimate to its own deliverance."

The Life Divine—Sri Aurobindo

"For that matter, what do you object to in Christ personally—I mean apart from his disciples' interpretation of him?"

"First, his dogmatic assertions of hell and hell-fire† and secondly, his senseless asceticism. Has not he said for instance, that he who looks on a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery in his heart? How senseless!"

We laughed.

"Let us go out for a walk," he suggested suddenly. "I find it hard to sit indoors when the sun shines brightly outside."

"About asceticism, Mr. Russell," I said as we were walking, "don't you think there is a core of truth and wisdom in it somewhere?"

"In what way?"

"Well, for instance, the beautiful creations of man in the realm of thought or art or poetry are generally recognised now as products of sublimated sex-energy. Therefore don't you think humanity would have been the loser, had our best artists exhausted their creative fire in the direction of unbridled sex-enjoyment?"

"Oh, I certainly believe in that and agree that the best productions in art depend on a certain amount of sex-frustration. That is to say I consider it desirable that the greatest artists should sublimate a lot of their sex-energy in order to create fine works of art. But you see here, as elsewhere, extremes should be rationally avoided. If you sublimate moderately it is entirely to the good, but if

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† "I must say that I think all this doctrine, that hell-fire as a punishment for sin, is a doctrine of cruelty. It is a doctrine that put cruelty into the world and gave the world generations of cruel torture and the Christ of the Gospels, if you could take him as his chroniclers represent him, would certainly have to be considered partly responsible for that" . . . .

Why I am not a Christian.—Russell

you do it too much, you have to pay for it, for sex takes its revenge.

"But surely the ascetics don't have this view of sublimation in mind when they preach asceticism," he added ironically. "At all events, it is not out of their solicitude for art or a harmonious personality that they preach chastity. They set up hard and fast codes of conventional morality at their own sweet will, arbitrarily, and conventional morality in such cases works only the wrong way about for the simple reason that it is most irrational, inelastic and dogmatic."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, when an artist creates he may turn to his sublimated energy for creation. But he can do so only when the sublimation is natural. That is, he must not fabricate artificial means of frustration when circumstances of themselves do not entail it; for then he doesn't have his creative impulse truly stimulated. And lastly, imposition of too much restraint on sex has a warping effect on our whole outlook on life, and that can't be conducive to a healthy art."

"But how is one to know how far one may satisfy sex and when to impose restraint?"

"The amount of self-restraint one is forced to practise if one is to live in a workable harmony in modern society is, I think, quite enough. No need for more heroic attempts to sublimate sex."

"Will you be a little more explicit, please?"

"The number of women whom you desire but cannot get must force you to practise enough of self-control, I think," he said banteringly. "For then you will have sublimated more of your sex-energy than you will know what to do with."

"Do you think all the great human activities require this sort of sex-sublimation?" I asked, somewhat nonplussed.

"I think that the activities which are purely intellectual differ from those which are essentially artistic; for I feel that the work of scientists and purely intellectual men rather improves in quality when their sex is satisfied. Possibly it is different with art."

"But why must the artist pay such a heavy price for his creations when the scientist doesn't have to pay equally for his?"

"I don't know that it is such a great price to pay for most artists, eventually," railed Mr. Russell. "An artist often receives coldness from his beloved one day and gets over it by composing a beautiful poem. For, the next day she relents, doesn't she?"

We laughed.

"I am talking here of the average artist, of course. He often strikes me as remarkably similar to the male peacock who struts in his gaudy feathers when wooing his lady-love. Perhaps he might not dance for all he was worth—did she not at first give him the cold shoulder and were she not so capricious. For by her obstinacy she only enhances her value, doesn't she?"

We then came to discuss the relative intelligence of men at different epochs in the history of evolution. Mr. Russell deprecated the popular view that evolution must mean progress towards a more and more evolved species. "It is nothing of the sort," he said, "for evolution simply means the change the species undergoes in adapting itself to its changing environment. The tapeworm, for instance, is a highly evolved animal, yet we don't recognise it as such."

"Do you think then that the average intelligence of man is better in quality today than formerly, say at the time of the Greeks?"

"If you talk of the Greeks, then I must say that the capacity of the average intelligent man of today could hardly stand a moment's comparison with theirs."

"You think we are inferior?"

"Oh, decidedly."

"But our achievements—"

"Ah, you mustn't confuse the issue. We have achieved more because today the sum total of our knowledge and equipment is much greater than what the Greeks had at their disposal. Just as Einstein has reached higher than Newton because he could stand on Newton's shoulders."

"So you don't think Einstein a greater man than Newton?"

"I should rank him as the equal of Newton in native capacity—and the only scientist after him who has been his equal. But we were talking of the Greeks. Suppose, for instance, that some twenty thousand Greek babies were preserved in a refrigerator and suddenly resuscitated today; the most intelligent among them, with our knowledge and resources, would simply walk through our most intelligent men. Mind you, I did not mean that the average man among the contemporaries of the Greeks was superior to the average man of our age. I say this only about the Greeks and not about their neighbours."

"But then you do not seem to be particularly hopeful about the prospects of improvement in the human material," I observed.

"One could have hopes provided science had a freer hand."

"Science?"

"Well—it is a question pure and simple of improving the breed. We can today improve it by utilising the knowledge we have acquired through scientific research. In a nutshell it is like this: given facilities, science can today set about allowing only the best stock to breed, leaving the inferior stocks merely the right to sex, but not the right to propagation—as I was telling you and thus there need be no limit to our glorious achievements through science provided we place more reliance on science than on superstitions."

"But do you think it's really going to happen?"

"That is what remains to be seen. In Europe the Catholic Church maintains that birth-control is immoral. Science holds that selective birth-control will improve the species here and now. During the last fifty years the average of intelligence among us has been lowered—thanks to the Catholic Church which has induced the worst stocks to be prolific, while the best have limited their families despite the clerical denunciations of birth-control. It is now a race, at bottom, between science which wants to improve the average and the Church which clamours for race-deterioration."

"Do you think that science will get the better of the Church?"

"Not in Europe, I fear," said Mr. Russell dubiously. "Our only hope now lies in America which has already started artificial sterilization of the feeble-minded in the States. That is a great step forward in the right direction."

"But supposing Europe doesn't follow America's example in this connection, what then?"

"It doesn't so much matter provided America goes on, for then she will soon have produced a race of men so immeasurably superior to us, decadent Europeans, that we will be exterminated in no time. Thus it will be quite all right so long as one nation at least plods on in the right direction."

"This is indeed 'thinking dispassionately' with a vengeance, Mr. Russell, don't you think?" I remarked smiling.

"Well, there is no sense in thinking unless one thinks dispassionately, is there? The little real happiness of which mankind has today discovered the secret has been rendered possible only by looking at life objectively and dispassionately."

"How?"

"Well, real happiness comes only to those who do not scramble for it frantically, but are interested in things for their own sake. That is to say, if we were interested in things not because we loved them for themselves, but because we thought we would be happy thereby, then happiness should surely elude us like a mirage."

June 28th.

Next day I called on him at about one. We discussed a few casual topics, then I asked:

"What do you think of the future of pacifism, Mr. Russell?"

"Not very heartening, I am afraid."

"Then why write so much about it?"

"Well, one likes to believe that one may succeed, but I fear the odds are against us. When the war came on I discovered this to my utter disillusionment."

"Disillusionment?"

"Well, we were told during the war, for instance, that the modern means of warfare are becoming so horrible that men will grow sick of it eventually. But that is bad psychology, for the greater the fear of defeat, the greater will be your hatred and ruthlessness under arms. I think in the next war our improved scientific inventions will equip us with a far superior technique for mutual international homicide, like spreading decimating microbes in the rank and file of the enemy's country, for example."

"How horrible!"

"Horrible enough in all conscience, but I fear there is no way out."

"None whatever?"

"Not unless America or some such great nation comes to dominate the whole world, so that all countries may live at peace with each other under one flag."

The lunch-bell rang. After the meal we started out for the beach, Mr. and Mrs. Russell, the two children and I.

"I was reading Mr. Wells' *World of William Clissold* yesterday," I said as we clambered up the bluff, "He thinks that Marxism has been exploded. Do you think so?"

"No, I don't,—at least not completely," said Russell, "I feel there is much truth in what Marx has said."

"For instance?"

"The tendency of modern capitalism seems to shape itself very much along the lines he predicted, namely that under modern conditions the management and control of industries will tend to become more and more concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. And then his economic interpretation of history, for example, which also contains a large measure of truth."

"So you are inclined to believe that Marxism has not been exploded, and might continue?"

"What do you think, Dora?" asked Mr. Russell.

"Well, I think it isn't really a single isolated question," she said. "For even if Marxism were completely exploded, it might still continue for a long time to come."

"How do you mean?" I asked.

Mr. Russell took up the cue.

"It is like this," he explained. "Christianity was exploded long ago, somewhere about the third century, as soon as a few intelligent men came to probe its truth and validity, but it continues all the same, doesn't it?"

We laughed.

"But supposing we evolve a sounder form of socialism, a system which has a deeper vision of the truth of things, —may it not have a better chance with the masses than Marxism, for example?"

"Hardly."

"Why?"

"Because the greater the truth in any system, the more complex it becomes and consequently the more difficult to explain or comprehend. Only falsehood can be simple enough to have a chance with the masses." *

"So you seem to favour an aristocratic view of life?"

"What do you mean?"

"You seem to favour the view that truth is meant for a handful of people only."

"It isn't that I favour any view this way or that," he said rather animatedly. "Only I plainly see life as it is, in its true colours, that's all."

"Will you explain yourself a little more clearly?"

"Why can't you see this simple fact unbiassed by your ethical interpretation of life?" he said more incisively. "Why must people persist in falling into hopeless confusion by wishing to have things turn out in a particular way? Why won't they try, for a change, to look at things dispassionately and face the simple fact that truth has nothing whatever to do with our approval or disapproval? Let us take an instance: it is in a very complex way that currency works and influences everyday life, isn't it? Now, if I say that an untrained man cannot understand how it works because he hasn't yet acquired the capacity to tackle the intricacies of the problem, I do not imply that he should understand it or leave it: it is a statement, pure and simple, of a fact, nothing more. If I say that

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* Cf. "Elle ('la foule') demande des affirmations et non des preuves. Les preuvent la troublent et l'embarrassent. Elle est simple et ne comprehend que la simplicité. Il ne faut lui dire ni comment, ni de quelle maniére, mais seulement oui ou non."

"The masses want affirmations not proofs. These only trouble or embarrass them. They are simple and understand nothing but simplicity. It is little use telling them the why and how of things but only yes or no."

Le Jardin d'Epicure—Anatole France.

only giraffes and not horses can reach the tender leaves of the top-most branches of a tree, it is similarly a statement of a fact and not a wish that horses had longer necks. When we observe life and generalise about it, we should similarly see facts without any bias one way or another.* Do you follow?"

I nodded.

"Forgive me if I became rather excited," said Mr. Russell a little later as we sat side by side on a hill overlooking the sea.

"I really didn't mind, Mr. Russell; I was possibly a little unwary. But it is really worthy of you to have answered my volley of somewhat tiresome questions so patiently and then apologise when it is I who misunderstood you."

"I did not mind the questions in the least, I am sure," said Mr. Russell very kindly. "But you see one of my aims has always been to look at life as dispassionately as possible, steering clear religiously of our all-vitiating ethical bias when observing things. For that is of the essence of the scientific spirit."

"I quite understand, Mr. Russell," I said, touched. "But what made me ask you whether you favoured aristocracy of intellect to democracy as a philosophy was this. Lately I have come to doubt the thesis of Tolstoy and his spiritual disciple, Mahatma Gandhi, who both claim that man's loftiest achievements in the realm of art or thought must be immediately comprehensible to all—

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* Cf. "The attempt of human thought to force an ethical meaning into the whole of Nature is one of those acts of willful and obstinate self-confusion, one of those pathetic attempts of the human being to read himself, his limited habitual human self, into all things and judge them from the standpoint which he has personally evolved and which most effectively prevents him from arriving at real knowledge and complete sight."

The Life Divine—Sri Aurobindo.

here and now. At one time I had been inordinately influenced by Tolstoyanism—"

"Well, Tolstoyanism has been psychoanalysed to yield some highly interesting results. The Russian saint, you see, was a very vain man—you can see that from his photograph—but unfortunately not as cultured as he was vain. So vanity and self-love unconsciously impelled him to fabricate a philosophy which encouraged him to feel superior to things he didn't know or couldn't understand. There you have the psychology of Tolstoyanism in a nutshell. He rationalized even his lack of comprehension into a merit."

"Apropos of psycho-analysis, what do you think of Freud?"

"I consider him a very great man, though I don't subscribe to all he says."

"In what point do you differ?"

"Well, for one thing, I don't feel that all the impulses of life are derived from sex. For instance, love of knowledge is in my opinion not a sublimation of sex-energy, though artistic creations undoubtedly are. Our desire to know more and more is, I think, due to the sublimation of our love of power rather than sex."

"Why?"

"Because knowledge gives us power. Ability to bend men and things to our wishes is power, and knowledge enhances this ability."

He then went to have a swim in the ice-cold sea while I discussed diverse topics with Mrs. Russell.

"You differed from Mr. Russell about Russia, didn't you?" I asked her.

"Not quite," she answered. "I think we roundly agreed on fundamental questions, only maybe I had liked Russia a little better than he."

"I have been told that the Russian women are the freest women in the world today. Do you agree?"

"I don't," she said reflectively. "I think that women are freer today in England and America than they are in Russia—though I think that is because men in Russia are not very well-educated and not because the laws are faulty. The laws in Bolshevik Russia are, assuredly, a great advance on those of any other country in the world."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, in Russia any party to a marriage may get a divorce any moment without delay if he or she wishes to put an end to the marriage contract."

"But what happens to the children?"

"Well, I suppose the parents come to some sort of understanding on that point."

"But don't you think it's rather hard on children not to have the care of both the parents in infancy?"

"Why?" she exclaimed in unfeigned surprise. "Do you think they often do? A very great number of the children born today never know both parents, particularly among the working classes. It reminds me of the story of a labourer's boy who was crying. On being asked why, he said he had been beaten by the man who slept with his mother on Sundays.

"It was because the poor boy never saw his father on weekdays," she added, ruefully.

Mr. Russell had just come out of the water and squatted beside us on the beach. We then discussed the marriage laws in England.

Mrs. Russell said how absurd it was that no divorce was obtainable if both the parties committed misconduct. "Not only that," she added, "but the court simply won't grant divorce if during the period that the divorce proceedings are on, the husband and wife should meet even once on friendly terms. It is ridiculous beyond words."

"But don't you see that the court is supposed to be the immaculate champion of virtue," put in Mr. Russell in a mock-solemn tone, "so that it must be satisfied, for the upholding of righteousness, that at least one of the parties has been so deeply sinned against that he or she has to be furious with the sinning. But, for this fury to be righteous, there must be spotlessness—then only the law will consider the divorce meted out virtuously—otherwise it won't grant freedom no matter how miserable it may make the parties. And think how happy they might be but for the law's senseless intrusion!"

I was reminded of Mr. Wells' similar fulminations against the English marriage laws in his novel *The World of William Clissold.* I referred to them and asked why must the King's Proctor so decide to make himself a nuisance to couples whose only crime seemed to be a wish to seek their mutual happiness.

There was a faint flush on Mrs. Russell's cheeks.

"It is ridiculous beyond words," she repeated with acerbity and then, smiling at me: "almost comic, I should say. For supposing the plaintiff fails to obtain a *decree nisi* against a certain co-respondent, he can never again sue the latter even if fresh evidence comes to light against him."

"But I never heard of this!" I exclaimed.

"Didn't you" interjected Mr. Russell. "But you wouldn't be so surprised if you knew the tricky point of our priceless law, which is that you couldn't be tried *twice* for the same offence! So the story goes that a man had been sentenced to penal servitude for life for having murdered a man who wasn't murdered really—it was somebody else who was. But nobody knew nor cared. So when the convict fellow was released after twenty years he coolly went and murdered the man. The law didn't know what to do with him as he couldn't be convicted twice for the same offence." We all burst out laughing in chorus.

We returned home for tea to find an American lady waiting for Mr. Russell. She was in ecstasies over Mr. Russell's book on education and said she had come straight from London to Cornwall to consult him about her son's upbringing. She spoke as enthusiastically about America's schools, which, she was persuaded, were the most wonderful institutions on earth—absolutely flawless. But oddly enough, it came out in the course of her subsequent talk that she had come to England with the sole purpose of putting her little son into an English school! Mr. Russell gave me a meaning glance.

"How do you really feel about Shaw?" I asked.

I said this intentionally because the American lady's enthusiasm for American schools reminded me of a remark of Mr. Russell that the Now World still believed in hundred per cent. Americanism, not having yet produced a Shaw.

"Oh, he's matchless! There are few men in this world whom fame and influence cannot spoil. Shaw is one of these. It is often a joy really to see his utter lack of interest in standing up to his great reputation. And so truthful, fearless, fond of cynical satire!—oh, his contact is refreshing!"

"And Galsworthy?"

"A fine artist, but not an important figure in the world of action."

"Who is such a figure in your opinion?"

"Wells, for instance," he said ruminatively, "though he isn't a great artist."

"Apropos, you know Rolland's pet thesis: that a great artist can't possibly be a bad man. What do you think of it?"

"Rubbish! Take Dostoievsky. He was a great artist, wasn't he? But he used actually to cringe before the authorities during his exile in Siberia: was a notorious sneak in fact."

"Do you read novels etc.?"

"Sometimes: that is, when I find the time, which, alas, isn't often."

"I suppose the bulk of your time is spent in writing?"

"Naturally. In fact I often have to seek seclusion in country-retreats like here, to be able to write away."

"Yes, it's obvious from your writings that you are a very fluent writer. But tell me, do you correct much?"

"Oh no. I write on—at a stretch and then at once send it to the press."

"I love your style—its economy of words and restraint. Did you cultivate the art?"

"That's right. I used in my boyhood to toy with different ideas to see in how few words I could express them. I have learned much from this early pastime."

The topic of India came up, at last.

"I suppose Indians are very bitter against the English," asked Mrs. Russell.

"I fear they are, particularly after the passing of the Ordinances, which have been instrumental in clapping hundreds of persons into prison without trial and detaining them there indefinitely. They may not even know the nature of evidence against them nor the names of the witnesses who act as informers."

"And the British Government accuses the Bolsheviks!" sneered Mr. Russell.

"It is really a pity," I said, "for now most Indians have come to believe all Englishmen to be hypocrites."

"I don't think you are mistaken there," railed Mr. Russell, "since the precious few who aren't hardly *count*."

I said: "At least so long as they don't give us anything more substantial than the present sham Reforms, I fear confidence in British sincerity isn't going to be restored."

"The Reforms, which they benevolently choose to give you, can't be anything but sham, don't you see? They won't give you anything else till they are in a 'blue funk. I have become deeply cynical of all Governments. I don't think any Government can be called 'good' today. And I don't believe you would have treated us any better if you had ruled over England."

"There I quite agree."

"But yet," continued Mr. Russell reflectively, "my reading of history tells me that a foreign culture can never be imparted to another nation except at the point of the bayonet. The Romans imparted theirs to England and France at the point of the sword and we are repeating it in India. It may be unfortunate, yet it has been the only effective way, hitherto, of spreading one's culture among an alien people."

"How do you account for it? I mean, why does subjugation become necessary?"

"Because, I suppose," Mr. Russell speculated, "it is only when a people are held in subjugation that they have the necessary respect for an alien culture. It is doubtful if it can be achieved in any other way."

"What about Japan? Hasn't she grafted the Western brand of civilisation into her own deliberately? None had forced *her*, at all events."

"But she *was* forced, that's just it. For it is a sheer historical fact—as you must be knowing—that at one time she had bluntly declined to open her ports to England and America. They compelled her to, by force of arms. She chafed under such high-handedness but fortunately, or unfortunately if you will, she lost no time in staging her appeals and protests. She swiftly approached our science, mastered our political technique and lastly, adopted our militarism *in toto*, and all with such incredible power of assimilation that she transformed the face of her Island-empire in the course of a single generation."

"But Japan's cruelty and ruthlessness, Mr. Russell," came suddenly from the American lady, "you forget that!"

"And you forget, madam," retorted Russell, "that here she has but taken a leaf out of *our* book—yours and mine. For between ourselves, do you honestly think you and I would have given her a fraction of the respect we do today hadn't the pupil all but outstripped the master in devilment?" Then turning to me: "But be that as it may, Mr. Roy, what Japan has achieved is without a parallel in human history. Just think, the Japanese statesmen and thinkers had planned out in the early 'sixties and 'seventies an elaborate programme of drilling their nation into the flawless, wholehearted, militarist nation it is today! And they have given effect, meticulously, to every single plan they had formulated *then*—more than half a century ago! It is marvellous, incredible—almost unparallelled in world-history!"

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

THE earliest recollection of Rabindranath that still glimmers in my juvenile memory is the faint image of a beautiful personality that used to visit our home in the days when my father and he had been good friends. Subsequently there was an unfortunate breach between them which was painful to us all. My father died in 1913. I longed to meet the Poet who had since become world-famous with the award of the Nobel Prize, but for a long time I hesitated and could not venture near him owing to this family feud. At last, however, the celebrated novelist, Saratchandra Chatterji brushed my qualms aside and presented me to the Poet in his Calcutta residence in 1919 just on the eve of my first visit to Europe. I at once fell in love with him, captivated by his characteristic cordiality and harmonious personality. Next year I met him in London at the Rothensteins' where I contacted Yeats for the first and last time. Then I met him at South Kensingston where he had taken a flat. It was there I learned really to love him, fascinated by his affectionate interest in my ideals, the more because most of my friends and relations thought nothing of them. I wanted at the time to take to music as a vocation and was told by my alarmed advisers that musicians in India being looked down upon, all my well-wishers would equate my project to madness. But the Poet encouraged me with his personal support and this touched me deeply.

On my return from the Continent, in 1922, I saw him a few times here and there but we moved in the thought-world somewhat parallelly, unmeeting. The first rapprochement came about in 1925 when I had some highly interesting and profitable discussions with him on music. These I published* with his authorisation and correction, but refrained from translating into English because the subject-matter was somewhat too technical. I wanted, however, to delve into deeper topics, but for this opportunities did not present themselves till, thanks to Srimati Rani Mahalanobis—a great favourite of the Poet—I was invited by her frequently to her house where he was then staying. Stimulated by her lovely personality the Poet often talked on for hours and hours and how beautifully! A few of these talks have been published by the *Vishvabharati Quarterly* but as these have been entirely written out by him I have not translated them for the present book. A few years later, I had some more intimate talks with him. My report of these I read out to him and he sanctioned their publication as he was now very pleased with my rendering of his ideas. This is what he wrote in his letter of gratified approval (dated 29-6-1938):

"When I say that in the account of our talks which you want now to publish, my spoken thoughts have wakened relevant thoughts in your mind the value of your transcriptions is not dwarfed but heightened. A mechanical reproduction of my words is incomplete: all that you have thought about them has made the picture whole and living. In other words, what you have reported is not a copy but a creation. You may say this clearly and publish them, the readers will savour them all the more." †

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* In my Bengali book entitled "Tirthankar."

† The original letter—of which this is a translation—has already been published in full in my Bengali book, "Tirthankar."

It was New Year's day, 1927. The Poet had invited me and the well-known poet-composer Atulprasad Sen to spend the Christmas holidays with him at his country-residence in Shantiniketan. This joint visit of ours was, for me, an unforgettable experience. The Poet was in one of his most radiant and expansive moods and Atulprasad was one of the most lovable and refined personalities Bengal has ever produced with a sweetness and fragrance all his own. He died a few years later mourned by thousands who have loved him through his beautiful songs. I will begin by quoting one of these as he sang it the first day to the Poet. Although, its simple mystic beauty has lost much in my translation, I still hope a fraction of it has survived:

In the dark without end
Who are Thou, O Friend?
I am led as if by a hand!
But cannot see,
nor reach to Thee,
Nothing can understand!

To my eyes is given no light,
all seems eternal night . . .
Thou only my comrade there helping my plight:
To rout the gloom
thy star-lamp relume,
Thy splendid vision reveal.
Pierced by the thorns of pain,
I ask again and again:
"To what far realm this hard path?"—but in vain!
Once let me hear,
Love's lips grown near,
Whisper to my appeal.

If Thou art here by my side,
in this heart-lost darkness wide,
Stretch out Thy hand my weary soul to guide.
Though infirm my clasp,

loosen not thy grasp:
Hold me fast through woe and weal.

* * *

We sat at tea with the Poet. It was a limpid morning. The gold of the young sun made the trees and creepers outside our bungalow look like living things eager to greet every passing breeze with their rustling applause.

"I have often been on the verge of asking you," I said to the Poet, "what you thought of the moot question of our consciousness and its survival after death. How do you feel about it?"

"Well," he said, "I am persuaded that after the hiatus of death it doesn't, it cannot, trail off into nihil: but, at the same time, I don't think 'surviving' means a projection pure and simple of our present consciousness."

"Speak on, please," urged Atulprasad, his vivid interest aroused at once, "how does it survive then, you mean?"

"How shall I put it?" said the Poet meditatively. "Well, doesn't it often happen that after a great shock to our life things remain outwardly the same and yet we find as if some sort of revolution has taken place both within and without—a sort of reshuffling of things from top to bottom? It is something like that, I feel. In other words, our ways of perceiving, thinking, responding, thirsting, hoping, desiring—all must change radically due to the shock. For if a vast difference is made by the earthquakes of *life*, mustn't those of *death* cause a vaster topsyturveydom?"

"How is this difference translated in practice?" I asked.

"It is somewhat difficult to put it in words," the Poet said. "To put it somewhat crudely, your surviving consciousness may not feel, for one thing, that proximity to your dear ones is a matter of such a great moment after all. This I think because it seems extremely improbable that our after-death consciousness should have anything like a similar rhythm to our present one."

"Improbable? In what way?" I asked.

"Let me give you a simile," said the Poet. "Consider the life of the bird within its egg to its life without. Isn't there a vast and fundamental difference between the two rhythms? While the one is circumscribed, subconscious, inchoate and yet full of a deep longing to flower into conscious expression, the other is comparatively untrammelled, aware of its surroundings and partially fulfilled for having found the expression of wings. After death, I feel, there must be some such change of the very stuff and fabric of our consciousness—a radical transformation."

"I read the other day a somewhat similar idea mooted in our Tantric philosophy," I said. "Its substance was that with the progressive evolution of our consciousness our emotional expressions too, say of love, must gradually change; that is, the ways of their self-manifestation cannot remain the same when the consciousness isn't more or less the same."

"Quite," the Poet agreed. "And it reminds me of a charge often made out against me by people who find that my emotional expressions differ from most people. They fail to realise that were this otherwise, I might have been anything, but not a Rabindranath; that is, I couldn't have been so creative if I had been continually swayed by my emotions. And this isn't egotism," he added, "it isn't really. Have I not experienced vividly, time and again, that the Arch-designer has willed through his pattern of Rabindranath, to shape him along a certain intended development in a, shall we say, Rabindrian direction? That is why he has put a heavy enough load of responsibility on me, yet not of the too adverse kind; has plunged me into oceans of pain and sorrow, yet wouldn't suffer me to go under; heaped on me momentous experiences, yet neither crushed nor bound me with various chains so that my inner life-movements may remain still unfettered."

"We are told," commented Atulprasad, "that Napolean himself was somewhat of a fatalist?"

"You mustn't class me with fatalists of that stripe, though," deprecated the Poet. "For I believe we *are* free, within limits, to act wisely or foolishly, to choose this way or that—to do good or evil, in a word. And yet, there *is* an unseen hand, a guiding angel that does somehow drive the spirit on, forward, like a submerged propeller. Didn't you sing yourself yesterday:

In the dark without end who art Thou, O Friend,
I am led, as if by a hand!

Or does it sound cryptic still?" he queried, turning towards me.

"I think I see points of light in the darkness," I returned. "Don't we all feel—sort of sense—the Invisible Ordainer round about us without being able to lay our finger on Him? It must be something like that you intuit. Only . . . doesn't that apply equally to the common man, as well?"

"It does," the Poet seconded, "but with a difference. I will illustrate by another simile what I imply."

"Let us suppose there is a flutist who has fashioned some flutes. Naturally each of these has a different timbre. But you find that a few flutes surpass the others. Somehow or other, these emit deeper notes of the perfect pitch. The flutist no doubt plays on all his flutes, but he likes best to play on these exceptional ones. The same with regard to men. The Supreme Moulder of personalities has cast them in different moulds building them each with a different stuff of experiences, sensibilities and capacities. Yet some will always excel the rest. These, if you study them closely, are not unlikely to give you glimpses of a special design of the Designer. But please don't take my words too crudely. For then you will misunderstand me and make a wry face taking this for the common type of self-felicitation. For believe me, I don't want to flatter myself. On the contrary I say this out of a genuine humility. For doesn't this amount to laying stress on the happy combination of favourable circumstances, rather than a personal satisfaction of an individual achievement!"

"Why feel so squeamish about it, Poet?" laughed Atulprasad. "You may walk shoulder to shoulder with all and sundry, but does that make you their equal in stature? Who but a stone-blind egotist could fail to see that you are head and shoulders above them, anyday?"

"Thank you for the relief, Atul," laughed the Poet. "You see, it is like this. I have been brought up all along in a rather uncompanioned loneliness so much so that I took it for granted that here was a pale nonentity. As a result, my diffidence and shyness had taken roots so early that it was difficult for me afterwards to outgrow it."

"But nonentity!" I remonstrated. "You can't possibly mean that."

"I do, really. You can't imagine how I used to be ignored universally in those days. All were agreed that I was a perfect example of a ne'er-do-well."

"You don't say so!" demurred Atulprasad.

"It is a sheer fact, Atul, believe me," he said; then giving me his characteristic twinkle: "Would you believe it—even as regards my personal appearance it was rather late in the day in England that I had to be knocked into awareness that I wasn't quite an impossible-looking person: and this had to be borne home to me first by a cousin of mine."

"A cousin!"

"Wasn't that a pity?" he said archly, "when, fancy, she had gathered it from some of her fair friends too—who, alas, were even chary of a compliment to my face! But maybe, here I am being rather unfair to them. For who knows, perhaps the bashful sex felt ashamed to find me outdoing them in bashfulness."

Atulprasad broke out into his open laughter and we caught its irresistible contagion.

"Do tell us more, Poet," I importuned.

"But what can I tell?"

"Whatever you may, without committing youself too far," I said laughing. "Why not begin with the thrills you felt when the said fair ones sang hymns and burnt candles at the altar of your good looks?"

"That is easily achieved," he said. "It was simply this that I couldn't take it seriously at all. For believe me, as the whisperings about my beauty swelled into a diapason I decided that the Western standard of beauty was so different from ours as to be quite incomprehensible to the likes of me."

"Do go on," I urged eagerly. "For surely you can imagine how titillating it is for the likes of *us* to have from your own lips your doings in the field."

"But how to say anything worth saying when you have hardly done anything worth doing? Take it from me that at this time this country innocent was so ineradicably shy and diffident that even when he got wind, alas, of the impression he had made in the charming quarters, he couldn't make the hay of romance while the sun of favour still shone. In fact my bashfulness was so impossible that my brave cousin had, at times, actually to admonish me for fighting shy of the very shadow of flirtation. At times, well, she actually egged me on by leaving me unexpectedly in the lurch—alone with a sweet little thing—a friend of hers."

"How delicious!" laughed Atulprasad. "And pray what did you do?"

"Oh, why must you make me blush by asking such awkward questions?" he protested, "when all I did was to be dumb as—"

"The tomb?" suggested Atulprasad.

"Precisely," the Poet dittoed. "And do you know why? Because my mental adolescence was belated, honestly. An instance:

"On my first visit to England I stayed as the guest of a doctor who had two beautiful daughters. Now, as I look back on their ways at that time, I have not a vestige of doubt that they had both fallen in love with me. How I wish I had the moral courage to face up to it when there was yet time!"

Our chorus of laughter followed.

"But it was no laughing matter then, I can tell you," he added joining in. "Not to me anyhow. An incident or two will perhaps throw light on my adolescent psychology and, incidentally, on what I mean when I say this."

The Poet said: "You must remember that I had at that time already taken my first dip into the literature of romance and melodrama. So I had figured often enough, in imaginary encounters, as a knight-errant or dare-devil if you will. But there I lingered—in my day-dreamings: I could scarcely imagine that in stark reality anything savouring of romance might take it into its head to accost a nonentity like me. But to continue:

"I was yet in my teens when it was decided to send me to a Marathi family in Bombay where I was to learn to speak English. It was my first experience of living away from home. I didn't want to go, it goes without saying. But I had to, in spite of myself."

"The heroine," the Poet went on, "was then at the age of sweet sixteen. And she was as educated as she was alluring: clever, forward and—" he deliberated for the *mot juste.*

"What you style *hladini* in Sanskrit?" I helped out.

"That's the word" the Poet acclaimed, "whose true synonym in English would be charming and delightful rolled into one.

"It goes without saying," he continued in his musical voice, "that the circle of her devotees was anything but limited, and she had enhanced her graces since her last visit to England. Don't forget that in those days of the early 'eighties it wasn't so very common for ladies to pay such casual neighbourly calls on Europe as it has become in your noonday of culture."

"Well, she came often to me unasked," the Poet resumed after a pause, "in fact, she often sought me out for deliberate preference. Not only that: she hovered round about me on no end of pleas and pretexts: consoled me when I was sad, played pranks with me when I was cheerful—like putting her palms on my eyes from behind, etc.

"I will own that by now I was ripe enough to sense that something worth happening was, indeed, happening to me. But, alas, I had neither the initiative nor the presence of mind wherewith to accelerate things.

"One evening she erupted into my room without the least notice," the Poet went on. "It was a moonlight night: breezy, enchanting, flawless! But I simply wasn't there: I was on wings towards our home, our Bengal scenery, our rippling Ganges of Calcutta—in a word, I was in the throes of homesickness."

"Where are your wits gone, wool-gathering?" she admonished me abruptly. "You are simply not there!"

"I was not a stranger to her ways," the Poet continued. "But that evening there was a definitely novel vibration in the air. For as she dealt me her rebuke she sat down close to me on the edge of my cot.

"I got confused . . . didn't know what to say . . . hummed and hawed, more diffident and gawkish than ever.

"You can well imagine that my malaise didn't exactly help her to feel at home. But she thought up a new device. 'Let's see who wins in a tug-of-war,' she suddenly suggested apropos of nothing as she gave me her outstretched hands to do duty for the rope.

"Believe me, I wasn't at all wise as to the import of her choice of tug-of-war among the sports. No, not even when, as we tugged, she suddenly admitted defeat tumbling into me with a significant softness at which I wondered." He paused and added: "This, I am sure made her give me up as past all hope." We laughed.

"At last she confided to me," the Poet resumed, the deep significance of the art of glove-stealing. 'I'll tell you what, Rabi,' she whispered. 'If a fellow can manage to steal a girl's gloves when she's asleep he has the right to kiss her.'

"She was reclining in an easy chair. Suddenly I found her in deep sleep. When she woke up she flung a furtive glance at her gloves. They were just there in full view beside her: nobody had thought of stealing them."

We laughed out once more.

By the time our laughter had subsided, however, the Poet's face had undergone a sudden and complete change of expression—as it often happened with him. Gone was the shimmer of speech; gone the delicate iridescence of his chaste jesting; gone, in a word, the darting of swift radiances from his deep eyes. A circum-ambience of tender wistfulness hung about his countenance as he sped through the dim vistas of his youth.

"But I have never forgotten her," he said, with a new ring of sympathy in his voice, "nor ever talked lightly of her. I could never insult her memory by putting a common label on her love for me. I have passed through various experiences of fire and shadow, the warp and woof with which Providence weaves its strange webs of human personality. But one thing I can say with honest pride: that I have never made light of the love of a woman no matter how she had loved me. I have always been grateful for it all, always looked upon it as a grace—a favour. For I have experienced again and again that every feminine love, no matter of what quality, leaves behind it a legacy of flowers in our soul, a harvest of dreams that would never have been born but for her showers of tenderness. Her gift of blooms may fade with time, yes, but the memory of their fragrance, never."

We were more moved than I can possibly convey. It is not often that the babble of conversation betrays the deeps of the soul . . . not often that beauty of expression crowns the profundity of wisdom.

And how often have I not been reminded later, of the Poet's eulogy of the chastity of our virgin emotions! And has he not sung himself so beautifully:

'The fire restrained in the tree
fashions flowers:
released from bonds it dies in ashes.'

* * *

Fortune favoured me: I found him alone. The evening was magical as only an Indian evening can be in the countryside of Bolpur. The whole landscape looked wistful in the afterglow of day that had died but still wished to live. The Poet stood gazing tenderly on the tinted clouds changing their colours like a chameleon. It so happened that a bee was hovering round his silver locks. He looked almost as ethereal, if not mythical against the sunset sky.

Suddenly I caught his smiling eyes fastened upon me. Once again his mood had changed like the chameleon.

"Your wonderful patience richly merits a discussion now," he conceded. "Dart your questions. The target is ready."

"You look too picturesque now," I said, laughing. "Besides, I am not in a pugnacious mood this evening."

"Come, come," he said ironically. "Pacifism doesn't sit well on you—but wait, not here. The shadows are fast creeping in. Let us adjourn to my study."

* * *

"What do you think of the modern woman's clamour for equality of status?" I asked. "I mean—in the sphere of social rights and responsibilities."

"You'll have to be content with a platitude for an answer," he returned. "For I have always held that, essentilly, woman is not man's competitor but his complement. This may sound somewhat old-fashioned, but an undeniable experience becomes richer with the stamp and seal of time on its brow. So I will reiterate that I do not think hat woman stands to gain in the long run by rushing out nto the open as a fellow-scrambler of her mate for the ame laurels. For her soul cannot find any real satisfacion if she goes out of her way to grab things that do not eautify life. She must preside over *her* world which is *eauty*. It is up to her to cherish her loyalties—the more ecause her partner is so liable to forget that our mascune civilisation harbours far too many disruptive forces. Women should not add to them and thus accentuate this stability. It is for her to restore the lost equilibrium rough the radiant touch of her more harmonious pernality, to act as ballast to the storm-ridden boat of our istracted civilization. Otherwise it would head for deep saster."

"Does that mean that she is to be debarred from claimg equal rights with men?"

"No—not that. All I mean is: she must not forget that r life has a real mission which is not the duplicate of r partner's. Of course she is there to co-operate with him—to give him her comradeship, often her guidance as well, but she would do well to remember that co-operation doesn't amount to imitation. She will co-operate best if she will give the help which she alone can offer. In other words, she must find her proper place in society, and not rush to fill somebody else's. And this she can achieve only by being true to her nature—her *swadharma.*"

"But why may she not aspire to share man's work in his own sphere?"

"Because her nature is unsuited for it: she could never be at home in the sphere of masculine rough-and-tumble activities. For," here he paused for a moment, as though in quest of one of those happy similes which never fail him, "for woman's function works passively, subterraneously, like the roots of a tree, while man's fulfilment consists in spreading himself out like the branches, through growth, adventure, activity. But in order that this activity may find fruition in lasting contributions to our civilization, his roots must be strongly embedded in firm soil, otherwise his upward growth becomes top-heavy. Woman furnishes this stable soil, serves to nurse the hidden depths of his personality."

"Excuse me, but is this not simply another way of saying that there is a fundamental difference between man and woman?"

"Of course. Do you think that the eternal play of this universe could have been sustained or even otherwise? No—it is unthinkable: if woman had been but an exact counterpart of man, with exactly the same part to play, life as we know it would have ceased to exist long ago. But fortunately, woman is not man's replica but his fellow-pilgrim in their joint journey through life—and that is why the march still continues—the *lila,* the play.

"And that is why," he went on to say, "woman is so well saddled by Nature with the qualities which man lacks, like humility, restraint, self-abnegation, etc. It is these qualities which have imparted stability to the restless world of masculine creation. For the feminine character is essentially a storehouse of throbbing life: she is the great incubator of nascent strength, the great healer of the jaded spirit. Life without her would be one unrelieved round of pointless gaieties, ephemeral excitements and spasmodic energy dogged by bottomless reaction, not unlike that which follows drug-stimulation."

"There are some who say that woman is incapable of creation in any but the inferior plane, and therefore must always play the second fiddle to man in the superior spheres of life."

"I cannot even conceive of assigning such an undignified function to woman," the Poet said. "I appreciate her contributions to life far too highly for that and I will tell you why.

"I feel that just as in the physical plane the germ of man works in the background, while woman carries it within her and nurses it into life, so in the mental plane the inspiration of woman must first implant its seed in man's subconscious in order that his creative impulses may bear fruit. So you see, woman's function in life is not really confined to the physical plane: she is as indispensable to man's mental creation as man is to her physical. It is only because on the mental plane she works unseen, behind the screen, that we do not visualize her contribution at this stage. But that is only because we are unimaginative."

I was vividly reminded of a poem of Tagore's called "The Grateful":

And still I knew because one day you came,
My songs have come, that flower-like bloom and flame
Nor yet have ceased, and sunlight's golden fire
One day has sung its soul to me, what lyre
Has sounded in your gaze's depths! No more

I feel your touch, but in my being's core
A touch-stone have you left; for sometimes still,
To me the universe, with a nameless thrill
Of Deathless joy appears, and makes me drink
The wine of ceaseless rapture.

"What you say," I said after a pause, "amounts then to this, that woman's way of self-fulfilment must differ from man's?"

"Roundly, yes," replied the Poet. "The chief thing to remember is, that woman cannot have been created by Nature to tread the same beaten track as man, mouthing the identical slogans. The banks of a river are not intended to serve the same purpose as its current. And it is because the two are dissimilar, that the river continues to flow. Otherwise it would merely become a morass or a swamp."

"The essential needs of the two sexes must also be very dissimilar then?"

"Unquestionably."

"In what way, precisely?"

"For one thing Man can be more at home with the nonhuman qualities than woman,—can be more easily impersonal, even anti-social if you like. Woman is by temperament taken up with the personal, the human, the social side of our nature. Briefly, man accepts human beings for their usefulness, woman for their humanity. That is why a human being is often much more immediately real to a woman than to a man; and that is why man finds her not only stimulating but refreshing and rejuvenating. The *hladini* (joy-giving) qualities are native to her in a much more vivid sense, and there lies the secret of what we call her charm or grace. It is as native to her as nimbleness is to a swallow, or whiteness to mountain snow."

"It is not for nothing," he added, "that man turns with relief to her in the monotonous round of his activities and is drawn to her as iron to magnet. Her grace and charm and sweetness—that is, her *hladini* qualities again —are necessary to our very existence, and this is no mere poetising but an incontestable experience of our everyday life."

"And that is why," he went on meditatively, "although man needs freedom and space—*mukti*—more fundamentally than woman, who needs nest-building as urgently, he can never find complete fulfilment in mere empty space. I spoke to you once of the completion and fulfilment that only a Sujata could give to a Buddha, a Martha or Mary to a Christ! It has ever been so in the history of human striving. One is incomplete without the other. Even the *tapasya** of a Shiva was secretly homesick for the tender solicitude of a Parvati."

"I can understand that. The only thing I do not quite follow is the remark you made just now: that man needs freedom more fundamentally than woman. Do not both of them need it equally?"

"I did not imply woman has no such need. What I meant was that woman's need for emotion and 'earthwardness' is greater than man's. Or, to put it differently, while womanhood finds its completest fulfilment through love and home, man's perfect fulfilment needs a more generous margin of freedom, of comparative detachment. Man at his highest is essentially an aspirer after the Infinite: he cannot be a stay-at-home, a non-explorer."

"But surely woman also has similar aspirations?"

"Of course she has; every fulfilment, however partial, must mirror some aspect of the Infinite; just as every joy, however fugitive, reflects some ray of the eternal bliss. Do not run away with the idea," he smiled, "that I want to insinuate that woman is not as much a human being as man is and therefore can have little truck with the infinite aspirations of humanity. Her salvation too must lie in the direction of the Infinite,—that goes without saying. Only, her method of attaining it is different from man's; that was my whole drift. For she too must touch the Infinite, the Eternal, though not, like him—through *mukti*—expansion and detachment—but through *bandhan*—bonds and concentration.

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* Austere disciplined striving for spiritual illumination; askesis.

"For," he went on, "Nature has in effect ignored man, comparatively, and focussed her attention more on woman. But man has paid Nature back in her own coin, with the result that he can occasionally ignore—even defy her. Not so woman: that is to say, she cannot defy Nature with anything like the same impunity as her partner—man."

"It is still not quite clear to me, forgive me."

"I will give you an example," he said. "The impulse for instance, which enabled Buddha to abandon his wife Gopa in quest of the Infinite, is a true impulse for man, but not for woman."

"You mean Gopa was essentially incapable of giving up Buddha, to attain such an end?"

"Precisely."

"But why must that be?"

"Because Gopa was a woman. Her nature could neither hanker after nor thrive in the void of the utter renunciation and detachment which Buddha accepted."

"But aren't there women too, whose nature—"

"Of course there are. But that is simply another way of saying that there are women whose nature is essentially masculine just as there are men whose nature is essentially feminine. But neither of these types is a true representative of its sex, and may well be looked upon as somewhat of a freak. My remarks therefore are by no means invalidated because such anomalies as feminine men or masculine women are found to exist in Nature."

"But what exactly was the import of your statement just now, that Buddha could renounce Gopa with comparative ease, because of his essential masculinity? Cannot woman undertake such renunciations as unflinchingly when the call comes? Why should it be any easier for man to respond to such calls? And then, isn't woman just as essential to him as he to her? Or do you mean perhaps that love is more or less unnecessary to man?"

"No—not quite that," replied the Poet ruminatively, "for evidently that would be presenting the truth in a somewhat false light and subscribing to the one-sided tendency of modern civilization, which has brought into being the modern gospel of work and efficiency and organization, to the total exclusion of all beauty and grace which alone can give joy to these. I have always regretted that the centre of gravity of our modern civilization has leant more towards aridity than towards beauty, and said again and again that such a state of things augurs ill for the world. And I have always urged that the equilibrium should be restored by woman's coming out and taking a larger share and interest in our creative civilization. Therefore I couldn't have meant that woman was essentially unimportant to man. For evidently it could not have been altogether inconsequential to Buddha from the start whether Gopa loved him or not. Love must have been as much a necessity to *his* fulfilment as hers—that goes without saying. Only, unlike Gopa's love for him, his love for her was simply a vital aid to his own upbuilding—not his all-in-all. To put it differently, emotional fervour is the very backbone of woman's make-up, while with man it is simply a beacon-light in his life's voyage—a wonderful light if you will, but still not the be-all-and-end-all of his existence, as it is with woman. You follow me?

"Besides," he said quickly, anticipating my objection, "there is really no essential disparagement involved in such a statement. For it simply means that woman is different from man, that is all. And, in reality, it is precisely because woman is differently constituted that creation recreates itself endlessly in multitudinous ways. If she were merely the counterpart or facsimile of man, then all throbbing of expression and beauty would be still-born. In fact, it is to allow creation to renovate itself continually that Nature is so averse to having one sex as a mere echo of the other. They were created different, and different they must remain, if they are to fulfil themselves fully."

"That reminds me," he added, "of what you told me the other day, about the elopement of a certain married lady of high standing, even when by so doing she faced absolute ruin. You expressed your surprise that a wise friend of yours should have seen nothing surprising in it, but simply asserted that in such a case she could hardly hesitate to throw up everything for her lover; meaning that, to her, every other consideration must always be subordinate to her supreme need of love. And you thought then—didn't you?—that perhaps he was going a little too far?"

"I confess I was not so sure, at the time," I admitted. "For I used to think then that it was the woman who was more likely to hesitate, when it came to the question of paying the price in society. For man so often gets off scot-free, leaving the poor woman to pay the price of their joint defiance! So I was a little surprised that, in such a case, she should not have thought twice before leaving all for love."

"There is nothing surprising in that," said the Poet. "For when a woman truly loves, she loves with her whole soul, she clings to love, as it were, with every fibre of her being. That is why, at the parting of the ways, she can more easily give up everything to follow the call of love unhesitatingly—to the very end."

"Don't you think, however, that in such a case a woman may, later on, come to regret having taken that step—especially where social persecution is relentless?"

"Not unless the love of the man for whom she faces the persecution grows cold."

"Do you think that in such a case it may—with time?"

"I think that if his love required him to sacrifice his life's work, it is highly probable that he would find in the end that love could not compensate him enough; at least not unless he were a feminine man."

"Excuse me, but—"

"Listen," he interrupted, "I will try to be even more precise; for I can see that you still find some difficulty in grasping the line of demarcation which I would draw between the fundamental natures of Man and Woman."

After a pause, he resumed slowly: "I, for one, cannot but look upon man fundamentally as a *seeker*—that is, an explorer, an aspirer after the infinite—call it Salvation, or God, or Nirvana, or whatever else you like. Thus no experience, however great, could give him his deepest fulfilment if it shackled his feet, if it kept him always fettered to his moorings. Love can be a great experience, a very great illumination indeed, as I said just now, but only if it satisfies this condition. Do you follow me so far?"

I nodded.

"The salvation of woman, however," he continued, "lies along a different route. With her Love is not merely an illumination but the central pivot of her being—her very *raison d'être*. That is why, unlike her partner in life, she *can* fulfil herself exclusively through love.

"Consequently," he continued, "if a real man asserts defiantly that he also, like woman, can cling to love with his whole being, then such a boast must be due either to a temporary blindness of infatuation, or to pure bravado. In either case, his nature shall be revenged upon him eventually."

A silence fell between us for a few seconds.

"And that is why," he resumed, "so many noble men have let their lives end in utter waste, mistakenly thinking that a man too could, like a woman, count the world well lost for love. That is unfortunately not true of man. For he cannot afford to renounce all his aims in life, and be satisfied with love alone though woman often may."

"What should then be the line of conduct of a woman in such a case?" I asked, after a little while.

"You mean in the case where social ostracism compels the man to sacrifice his whole career?"

"Yes."

"You know how deeply I feel for the hard lot of woman all the world over. So I cannot but regret to have to say that, in such a case, the woman, if she truly loves, should not accept the tremendous sacrifice of the man, who throws up everything for her love. She must never ask him to nest in her love for ever; for she should not be blind to the fact that, in all such cases, the price that she asks her lover to pay for the nest is bound to prove in the end more than he can afford. And the reason is what I told you just now: that the male bird, unlike the female, doesn't find in his nest a sufficient compensation for his clipped wings. To sum up, a woman may find her complete fulfilment in love alone, but not so a man."

"But supposing a woman throws up everything for her lover, is it not rather hard on her, that she can never expect a similar total self-surrender from her partner?"

"I do not think it is," said the Poet, "for you mustn't forget that, although a woman's love is all but elemental in its passion—that is, essentially reckless in its onward course—yet in the end she gives herself so unreservedly not for the sake of love alone: her fullest fulfilment lies only through motherhood."

"Doesn't this sound a little old-fashioned?"

"Why must you suppose that Dame Truth is like the lady of fashion, who runs eternally after the phantom of the latest vogue?" The Poet smiled ironically.

"It is only my fear and misgivings," I apologised. "Also, it occurred to me just now that your observation savours curiously of Nietzsche's time-old cynical generalization: 'Der Mann ist fur das Weib ein Mittel: Der Zweck ist immer das Kind.' *

"But I did not mean to be cynical when I made the remark. For I do not consider it in the least derogatory to woman to be the mother of her child. On the contrary I would bow to motherhood for the great sacrifices it involves. What I mean is: since she must and does find her final fulfilment in motherhood, what she gets from her mate *can* satisfy her the moment she achieves this supreme fulfilment. Surely this has no kinship with Nietzsche's accent?"

"But what about those who don't want motherhood,—there must be many such women?"

"Here one thing should never be lost sight of," he replied. "The mighty force, which is like the pivot on which this universe of constant creation and reproduction turns, most often works covertly, subterraneously. It is this force which represents our truest motives and desires—not the apparent motives that come to our conscious surface. Thus, if a woman says that she wants in marriage only a physical, or mental satisfaction if you will, and not motherhood at all, then I will simply say that she is either abnormal, or else not yet aware of her fundamental need. For our surface desires are, often enough, a very misleading index to our real needs—but this hidden urge—never; for it always knows what it wants, even when our conscious self fails to perceive it. And this hidden urge lays down that woman shall not fulfil herself completely, except through motherhood."

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* For woman man is but a means to an end: the end is the child —always.

We were silent for a few seconds. Then I asked, a little hesitatingly: "My friend has requested me to ask you what he should do *now*. His position is very difficult, as you see."

"It is more difficult still to advise on such matters," said the Poet. "Yet so long as society is what it is, I feel there is nothing for your friend but to sublimate his frustration in love."

"I would tell him," he added after a brief pause, "to look upon this tragic love of his as a great experience in his life, to regard it as an invaluable illumination in his journey, to prize even the pain it brings him now, as one of the greatest gifts that life has to bestow. For all our greatest realisations come to us through two things going side by side, a getting and a 'doing without' as Goethe used to say.

"Because," he continued dreamily, "one of the eternal aspirations of the soul is to outsoar its possessive instinct. What we grab we lose—I mean in point of concrete, physical satisfaction. That is why the soul ever strives austerely to rise superior to the lures of possession. The purer the joy, the deeper the touch of this not-possessing. There, indeed, lies the eternal secret of the appeal of renunciation, of detachment—of *mukti*—of freedom. I do not mean here the rude and coarse outward freedom and renunciation so often hailed as the goal by dogmatic ascetics; I mean the inner freedom that enjoys, without being bound by its enjoyment."

I recollected these beautiful lines in the Poet's "Sadhana":

"We see everywhere in the history of man, that the spirit of renunciation is the deepest reality of the human soul. When the soul says of anything: I do not want it, for I am above it, she gives utterance to the highest truth that is in her. When a girl's life outgrows her doll; she throws it away. By the very act of possession, we know that we are greater than the things we possess. It is a perfect misery to be kept bound up with things lesser than ourselves . . . It is only when a man truly realises what his possesions are, that he has no more illusions about them; then he knows his soul is far above these things, and he becomes free from their bondage."

"In all our deeper love," he resumed, "this getting and not-getting run ever parallel. In one of our Vaishnava lyrics the lover says to the beloved: 'I feel as if I have gazed upon the beauty of thy face from my birth, yet my eyes are hungry still; I have folded thee to my heart for millions of years, yet my heart is not satisfied.'

"So all I can wish is, that your friend may never regret this experience, even if a gulf separates him from the woman he loves. May he never turn a cheap cynic who derides this faith that physical possession is not the highest boon of love. The highest love must transcend all such tangible satisfactions. It can transmute even the deep pain of a life-long separation into the highest joy of union in the domain of spirit and stimulate our creative impulses through the very pain that outward frustration brings in its train. This is no mere rhetoric: it is one of the abiding realizations of man, testified to by the experiences of poets, prophets and heroes. That is why it is often indispensable,—particularly for the creative soul—to buy the experience of love, at the price of deep pain, even torment. For man fulfils himself in love in the measure that he advances towards self-unfolding in the light shed by love on his path: he breaks to bloom in creation, joy and self-realisation through the quickening of this seed of love in the soil of his heart; and lastly the veil of mystery and enigma that limits his vision, lifts only at the magic touch of the wand of love.

"For," he went on, "we realise nothing in life, until it becomes a part and parcel of our being, assimilate nothing unless we pay the price. The realisation of love calls for this price, often enough, in the shape of deep, abiding pain. If we grudge this price we shall never realize love, far less transmute it into an asset of our authentic personality. We cannot take anything if it is simply given to us, any more than we can have it for the asking. We must merit it, earn it, be ready, if need be, to pay for it with our life's blood. Then alone is the getting real, then alone may love accept us, and give us all that lies in her power to give."

As the silvery cadence of his voice trailed away into the answering murmur of the breeze outside, the lines from a recent poem of his came thronging into my mind:

Throughout the day thou hadst no call for me, no need:
Perhaps it is but meet:
Whatever gifts my heart had kept for thee, they speed
In secret to thy feet!
By viewless paths my yearning thoughts their homage bring
To thee on pinions fleet:
The symphonies unheard in all thy temples, wing
In silence to thy feet!

June 10th, 1938.

In the summer of 1938 I went to Calimpong in the Himalayas as the guest of Srimati Asrukana, the charming daughter of a friend of my father's. The Poet was there. We called on him on a sunny morning after days of torrential downpour. He received us with his proverbial cordiality which, thanks to my fair hostess, was more marked on this occasion. The record of our conversation which follows I read out to him the next morning when he suggested a few changes and complimented me warmly on the fidelity of its representation. I had with him some other conversations too, but in this volume I include only the one which, I feel, will be more interesting to those who have no longer any illusions about modernism, science and progress.

The Poet told me he had immensely liked Aldous Huxley's *Ends and Means,* and subscribed entirely to the following passage when I asked his opinion about it. It was a fling at the science-worshippers who have this strange conviction that "the scientific picture of an arbitrary abstraction from reality is a picture of reality as a whole and that the world is without meaning or value." He enjoyed Aldous Huxley's criticism: "We are living now, not in the delicious intoxication induced by the early successes of science, but in a rather grisly morning-after, when it has become apparent that what triumphant science has done hitherto is to improve the means for achieving unimproved or actually deteriorated ends." (He adds in his chapter on *Beliefs:* "Most ignorance is vincible ignorance. We do not know because we do not want to know. It is our will that decides how and upon what subjects we shall use our intelligence. Those who detect no meaning in the world, generally do so because, for one reason or another, it suits their books that world should be meaningless.")

The Poet heartily agreed and added: "This is undoubtedly true: And the scientists themselves are admitting today—a good many of them are, anyway—that the findings of science need not necessarily hold in such worlds of experience as lie beyond the orbit of scientific experience and verification."

I quoted to him also what, hereanent, Sri Aurobindo had written to a friend of mine:

"How does Sir . . . or any other scientist know that it was by a *mere accident* that life came into existence or that there is no life anywhere else in the universe or that life elsewhere must either be exactly the same as life here under the same conditions or not at all? These are mere mental speculations without any conclusiveness in them. Life can be an accident only if the whole world is an accident, a thing created by Chance and governed by Chance. It is not worth while to waste time on this kind of speculation which is only the bubble of a moment."

The Poet agreed but added that the modern tendency among scientists had been progressively against dogmatic asseverations. Only the other day, he said, he had come upon a scientist's sad admission that all laws were man-made laws, and he pointed out that, in science, the latest change of thought and conceptions had been rather of the revolutionary kind—because scientific thought was moving fast."

"I would like to put to you a few more questions," I said, "but only if you are not too fatigued—"

"There, there," the Poet laughed; then turning to Asrukana: "have you noticed that even Dilip sometimes feels a sort of compassion for me, or compunction if you prefer that word?"

"I have," she smiled, "and been not a little astonished at such a miracle."

We laughed.

"In your poems in 'Prantic,' " I said, when the laughter had subsided, "it has been a source of joy to me to note your anguish at the deepening bankruptcy of human idealism. Yes, it has been a refreshing experience to feel that there are men still unwaveringly loyal to the spiritual values, and that one such worshipper at least can hymn the sky like a poet true to his inspiration. I only wondered why you omitted to point out any cure for the widespread evils of war born of human rapaciousness."

"I look at these things somewhat dispassionately now-a-days," he answered. "I'll tell you what my present angle of vision is. I see that in this vast play of life the sentient creatures used once to live in ways which were then favourable to their growth and well-being. Afterwards the times changed and with it these ways too, so much so, that the conditions which had once been favourable to life became inimical to it. The result: these creatures couldn't survive any longer. Let us take as an instance the huge mammoths. They could not possibly have been so huge at the start. Somehow or other their later editions wanted to grow in bulk, swelling in flesh and gaining in girth. But gradually it so happened that these did not find adequate sustenance for the huge accretions of fat they had acquired. So they whisked out deadly fangs and claws against their own kind, which meant the final extinction of their species. Then Providence devised a new dynamis: mind—which marked the end of the age of fat and claws and fangs.

"Thus came the age of mind. But the mind too, likewise, grew in bulk. Its proportions too, like those of its predecessors, the mammoths, swelled amazingly. And it transpired by and by that this mental mammoth also could develop its tooth and claw, as it grew inordinately in girth, bulk and weight. The thing is: every new force grows till it crosses the bounds of seemliness and harmony and then it makes straight for the abyss. For then the very devices that were once helpful as protective weapons become their deadliest foes, to be used against themselves.

"In this age of ours with whom do these mental creatures seek alliance? With the hordes of unholy Greed, of Cupidity. Man has elected to be in league with covetousness, thanks to siren Desire, and his obliging Mind supplied the necessary justifications contending that Desire was the primal pilot and Greed the supreme rudder. The result was that abysmal death climbed up to the summit-point of Birth in the wheeling play of life. Why then do you regret, when this seems to be the law of creation? But, incidentally, we learnt a new lesson: that Mind could be just as gullible as the rest. It dawned on us that the human mind, pampered ceaselessly, could head for the jaws of death just as precipitately as had done the prehistoric pampered flesh. Inevitably; because Mind too has its own network of tricks, its own world of illusions. That is why the Ancient Wisdom of the Vedas proclaimed that Mind could never reach out to Supreme Truth and Knowledge; for that you would have to turn to the guidance of the Soul, the Spirit. Mind may indeed offer to prescribe away, but it cannot cure the malady, because the obsession of greed is utterly beyond its healing power. Don't you see with your own eyes to what hell we have been dragged down following the lures of mind? Flesh had flourished up to a point, making for the success of the Mammoth, for a time. Then it had turned back to war against itself. The same irony was then at work in the field of Mind, which too succeeded—but up to a point: it too created, researched, conferred boons, yes. But when, vain of its ponderousness, it claimed to be the one law-giver of life, the sole judge and plumber of Truth—well, the Lord of the Spirit smiled silently. And cocksure Mind rushed on headlong, not to soar to the kingdom of Harmony and Unity but to delve into the underworld of greed and cupidity. What the result has been you see, all too plainly: men today are lost to the appeal of Humanity because Mind butted in and persuaded them that all such idealism was the outcome of archaic senility. The gospel of Lord Greed was tempting enough in all conscience and persuaded them to sow poison-seeds into their soil of lust. The harvest bore, of course: see our million death-dealing forests that suffocate. This being so, is it any wonder that man should come to fear his own kind as his deadliest foe? You can see manifestly to what bottomless pits of suicide he is hurtling down helplessly. Mind had promised to take him on its wings to the heaven of Power fortifying him with irrefutable arguments in favour of self-aggrandizement: but see to what catacombs of fear and cruelty it has brought him in stark reality. Man is today clawing the earth, devising horrible gas-masks, spending vast millions on weapons of destruction: and why? Because he has to live warring with his own brothers. Time was when he used to fashion weapons against wild beasts: today he has to improve on these a hundredfold because his enemy now is his own species—civilized Man. The disease is deadly indeed. That is precisely why—while subscribing to your sorrow—I couldn't echo your astonishment at their throwing bombs on non-combatant women and children. When you sow the wind how can you decline to reap the whirlwind? You have preferred the thorns to the flowers: so why now this loud claim of exemption for women and children and non-combatants? You favour a strange logic: for you smash Love which alone could prop the crumbling civilization, you put a premium on burning greed and then clamour for the cool shades of peace and the protective auras of compassion! But when you have deliberately plumped for red ruin, why this belated appeal to mercy for children and women? Why should they alone claim immunity from what is really our collective *karma?*"

"I well remember," I said, "what Shaw said in the last war. He pooh-poohed this outcry against Dumdum bullets, submarines and what not. Go the whole hog, he said, since you have chosen to use the devil's weapons till you plumb the deepest depth of your degradation. For then you may shudder at the shadow of your own devilry. Perhaps he is not far out. Granted. But this is hardly a message of hope or salvation. The question of questions asked since the dawn of creation remains: what is the way to the Promised Land?"

"The answer of answers too has been given since the same dawn," returned the Poet, "which is:—covet not, or as the Gita puts it: *'Swalpamapyasya dharmasya trayate mahato bhayat.'* * But men will not listen to the inner voice of supreme wisdom, what can you do? If, however, you really want to be redeemed no other voice can guide you home."

"What about equality?"

"Irreproachable ideal. Only one doesn't feel so sure when the Messiahs proclaim from housetops that the way of perfect love lies through unrelenting intolerance and murderous hatred."

"But what is the remedy? Have you found it?"

"So far as I am concerned, yes. It is to take the path that you feel to be the Truth, individually. If others come and join hands, so much the better; if not, go forward all alone on your pilgrimage."

"You won't organize?—"

"No," the Poet said emphatically. "They put to me this very question in America. I replied I had lost faith in this slogan of organisation. Aldous Huxley is quite right: you can't bring into being the era of truth through legislations of falsehood. But if you want to form parties and phalanxes you have to call in the aid of this very falsehood in some shape or other. Which means blows and then counter-blows. In short, the force behind so-called party-organisations is itself suspect: can you expect a solid creation to stand on hollow pillars?

"No," the Poet went on with a lift in his voice. "At least I award in favour of dissociation from Falsehood. I must be irrevocably vowed to emancipation from the last traces of greed, and when I shall have ceased to covet I shall have ceased to fear. I may die but I may not deal death, nor be cheek by jowl with Untruth. If this leads to loneliness, let loneliness be my lot, but never on any pretext of convenience or expediency will I seek alliances with Falsehood which must be rooted in party-organizations, no matter what their high-sounding names be.

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* Even an atom of the spirit's Light
Can save us from the yoke of grisly Night.

"Yes; for that is how the highest Truth has made its way in this world from age to age. Solitary individuals who reached the founts of Truth stood out all alone like peaks, like beacons for their personal-impersonal realizations; each one of them said: 'Whether ye hearken unto me or not, the Truth which I have realised still remains the Truth: the Truth that never had a beginning and will never have an end—whose watchword is Love.' The voices of these roused thousands and thus did the contagion of the Awakening spread. But then as soon as their followers organized themselves into sects and parties they betrayed the saviour Truth they professed. The result has been pollution. So now in every land, in every clime a few men have crystallized into a nucleus of light, men who have made bold to proclaim that though isolated they fear none. You may deride them, persecute them, even kill them, but never will they return blow for blow. For they are pledged, in everlasting loyalty and love, to the Voice of the Lord seated in the Heart."

I was reminded of the Poet's own song:

I know: no single prayer of love, by life begun,
Though unsustained,
No bud before it blossomed on the earth fell—wan
And shadow-stained,
No ill-starred rill that pathless in the desert ran,
Was lost, O Friend!

Nothing, I know, that aches for its hour of bloom shall wait
Ever in vain

And all in me that's still unborn—inviolate,
Trembles amain
In music on thy harp-strings, Lord, beyond the fate
*Of muted pain.**

* Translated from his Bengali by D. K. R.

SRI AUROBINDO

SRI AUROBINDO

CURIOUS as it might sound, I first heard of Sri Aurobindo as a great Yogi from an English friend of mine whose name was Ronald Nixon. I met him first in 1923 at Lucknow where he was a Professor of English at the University. He was deeply interested in Yoga and we used to discuss very often the mystic lore. He drew my attention to Sri Aurobindo's *Essays on the Gita* which had just been made into a book. He said he had never come across so masterly an exegesis of the Gita. His native insight into things spiritual struck all who came in contact with him as remarkable and I was therefore easily prevailed upon by him to read what had made such a deep impression on his avid, penetrating mind. Almost a decade later Sri Aurobindo whose disciple I had by that time become wrote after reading his letters to me that these showed that he had the "gift of right vision." (This letter has been printed in full among the letters of Sri Aurobindo which follow)

It was this vision that made Ronald see soon enough the futility of mere brilliant discussion of things of the spirit which he likened once to a 'painted flame which looks brilliant indeed, but cannot impart the warmth we light a fire for.' That is why, a few years later, he gave up his professorship and retired into an Asram in the Himalayas under a Guru who gave him the name of "Krishnaprem."

It was thus that I had been initiated into the wisdom of the East by a visionary of the West, a fact which chastened my oriental pride not a little by showing me once again that the Spirit knew of no *adhikar* (special prerogative) of birth or race or country: it called equally, to all —that is, *all who would hearken* to its Flute of Light and Love and Beauty. This also I learned from Sri Aurobindo slowly, because it is not often that one is quick to realize (what he wrote to me in a letter subsequently): "The Divine can lead, He does not drive. There is an internal freedom permitted to every mental being called *man* to assent or not to assent to the Divine leading." *"He that hath ears to hear let him hear."*

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To resume. After his *Essays on the Gita* I turned to his other writings like *The Ideal of Human Unity, A Synthesis of Yoga, Future Poetry, The Psychology of Social Development,* etc. Next I perceived, curiously, that the gulf between me and most of my friends had, as it were, suddenly widened—which happens to many who travel on the yogic path following even the call of booklore.

This only deepened the gathering twilight of my loneliness into the gloom of an isolation. I was seized with a nameless homesickness of the spirit for a haven I had just glimpsed, especially, after my intimacy with Krishnaprem. So I sought Sri Aurobindo's advice avidly, not only on my spiritual quest but on other things as well, like marriage. He wrote back, or rather one of his disciples did from his oral answer to my question. I can only quote a part of it:

"In your own case everything depends on your ideal. If it is to lead the ordinary life of vital and physical enjoyments, you can choose your mate anywhere you like. If it is a nobler ideal like that of art or music or service to your country, the seeking for a life-companion must be determined not by desire, but by something higher and the woman must have something in her attuned to the psychic part of your being. If your ideal is spiritual life, you must think fifty times before you marry . . . You are given here the general principles only. From its complexity you can easily imagine how difficult it must be to give you a clear-cut answer. With these data before you, you must decide for yourself."

At that time I was athirst for light—especially light on his yoga. I was then on a musical tour gleaning data on different styles of our music in different provinces. But somehow my work didn't grip me although it still interested me. So I grew more and more eager to meet him once face to face.

At this time I was drawn and yet scared by the idea of yoga or rather by my fanciful conception of the conditions of yoga. This was partly because mine had been pre-eminently a social temperament exulting in the sunlit soil of travel, music, laughter and robust optimism which, in Sri Aurobindo's language, support the "vital egoistic life" of worldly activism. Be that as it might, it cannot be gain-said that all I had stood for outwardly had been utterly out of tune with what the authentic yoga with its life of one-pointed aspiration and uncompromising self-surrender demanded. No wonder I was scared by what I then thought yoga had in store for its devotees: a life of awful austerities, desiccating discipline and withering solitude, all of which meant for me an utter stultification of life.

Yet I was so attracted by Sri Aurobindo's analysis of our world and his idea of evolution from the spiritual point of view, that I sincerely wished I could somehow practise his "integral yoga." I particularly liked his teaching arrogant reason its place, for I was deeply dissatisfied with the arid view of science that Life was an accident. I was growing sceptical of the learned ignorance of the reasoning mind which, in the end, led nowhere. So I was extremely impressed by Sri Aurobindo's essays on the *Psychology of Social Development* where he wrote:

"The spiritual aim in society will regard man not as a mind, a life and a body, but as a soul seeking for divine fulfilment upon earth and not only in heavens beyond which it need not have left if it had no divine business in the world of physical, vital and mental nature."

And also:

"The limitations of reason become very strikingly, characteristically, nakedly apparent when it is confronted with that great order of psychological truths and experiences which we have hitherto kept in the background: the religious being of man and his religious life. Here is a realm at which the intellectual reason gazes with the bewildered eyes of a foreigner who hears a language of which the words and spirit are unintelligible to him . . . He may try to learn this speech and understand this strange and alien life, but it is with pain and difficulty, and he cannot succeed unless he has, so to speak, unlearned himself and become one in spirit and nature with the natives of this celestial empire. Till then his efforts to understand and interpret them in his own language and according to his own notions end at the worst in a gross misunderstanding and deformation; they sound to men of religious experience like the prattle of a child who is trying to shape into his own habitual notions the life of adults or the blunders of an ignorant mind which thinks fit to criticise patronisingly or adversely the labours of the profound thinker or the great scientist. At the best even they extract and account for only the externals of the things they attempt to explain: the spirit is missed, the inner matter is left out and for that reason even the account of the externals is without real truth and has only an apparent correctness."

And then in his great book *The Life Divine*, I read that even when it is "permissible to suppose that truths of the physical universe can throw some light on the nature as well as the process of the Force that is active in the universe," it cannot be "a complete light, for physical science is necessarily incomplete in the range of its enquiry and has no clue to the occult movements of the Force."

All such criticisms and postulates and above all something deeply moving in his utterances drew me imperceptibly to the aura of his magic influence till at last I decided I had to see him personally. I longed to reach the heart of the mystery. It called to me and yet inspired strange misgivings in my mind although Sri Aurobindo had said that man today must "learn not to suppress and mutilate but to fulfil himself in the fulfilment of mankind even as he must learn not to mutilate or destroy but to complete his ego by expanding it out of its limitations and losing it in something greater which it now tries to represent." What had I to fear from such a seer? How could *he* model me into a recluse after all such noble reassurances?

So I wrote to him asking to see him. He consented. I made immediately for Pondicherry.

It was in January, 1924 that I saw him for the first time. I had the privilege of having a long talk with him on the 24th. The next day the duration of the talk was shorter. I kept an elaborate record of all that had passed and this report I sent him subsequently for revision. He approved of it substantially and made only a few minor corrections. But as these two interviews were not published then and as I received from him after I had come to live in his Asram permanently as his disciple in 1928 numerous letters throwing further light on his yoga, I have thought fit to add some extracts here and there from these letters written in answer to my deeper and more obstinate questionings. This device will, I hope, serve as a partial corrective to my own (necessarily) inadequate representation of his replies to which no penmanship can ever contrive to do justice. These subsequent explanatory notes, whether added to his talk or substituted for my original report of it, I have placed inside double brackets "(( ))"

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It was about eight in the morning. Sri Aurobindo lived then in the house which stands at the main entrance to the Asram. He was seated in a chair in the front verandah. I made him my *pranam* and took another chair in front. An oblong table stood between us.

"A radiant personality!" sang the very air about him. A deep aura of peace encircled him, an ineffable yet concrete peace that drew you almost at once into its magic orbit. But it was the eyes that fascinated me most—shining like beacons. His torso was bare except for a scarf thrown across.

"The greatest living yogi of India!"—my heart beat fast! Hitherto I had seen but a few *sadhus* and *sannyasis*, but a real yogi, who lived thus for years in seclusion and yet took some interest in my doings.*

He appraised me with his soothing yet penetrative gaze. It would be impossible adequately to portray my reactions . . . After a time I pulled my self together with an effort.

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* It was years later that I came to know that this had been more than a passing interest. He wrote then about this meeting of ours (I can't quote the whole of it—it is too personal):

"It is a strong and lasting personal relation that I have felt with you ever since we met and even before. . . . Even before I met you for the first time, I knew of you and felt at once the contact of one with whom I had that relation which declares itself constantly . . . and followed your career with a close sympathy and interest. It is a feeling which is never mistaken. . . . It was the same inward recognition that brought you here."

Another disciple of his told me years later that he had told them then that I was destined to come to him. He wrote, too, in a letter of his already published in my *Anami:* "Your destiny is to be a yogi and the sooner your vital Purusha reconciles itself to the prospect the better for it and all the other personalities in you."

"I have come," I stammered out, "to know . . . to ascertain rather . . . if I can be initiated . . . I mean I want to practise your yoga to start with, if possible."

He simply said: "You must tell me clearly what it is exactly that you seek, and why you want to do *my* yoga."

I was lost. Why? Did I know myself? How then to put it all clearly and cogently. I strove hard to find some light in my bewilderment.

"Suppose," I found tongue at last, "I suggested—or rather suffer me to ask if you could help me in attaining, or shall we say discovering, the object of life?"

"That is not an easy question to answer," he said, "for I know of no one desideratum which is cherished equally by all, any more than I know of an object of life equally treasured by all. The object or aim of life cannot but vary with various people, and seekers, too, approach yoga with diverse aims. Some want to practise yoga to get away from life, like the (illusionist) *mayavadi:* these want to renounce life altogether, since, this phenomenal life, they contend, is an illusion, *maya,* which hides the ultimate reality. There are others who aspire after a supreme love or bliss. Yet others want from yoga power or knowledge or a tranquil poise impervious to the shocks of life. So you must first of all be definite as to what, precisely, you seek in yoga."

"I want to know," I proffered desperately, "if yoga could, in the last resort, lead to a solution of the anomalies of life with all its native sufferings and humiliations."

"You mean transcendent knowledge?"

"If you like—but then no—for I want bliss too, crowning this wisdom."

"You can certainly get either from yoga."

"May I then aspire to an initiation from you?"

"You may, provided you agree to its conditions and your call is strong."

"Couldn't you give me an idea about the nature of these conditions . . . and about this call you speak of . . . may I ask what you mean exactly?

"I gathered from your booklet *Yogic Sadhan,*" I pursued before he could reply to my question, "that you called yourself, a Tantrik who believed in *lila,* and not a follower of Shankara believing in *maya.* You have written for instance: 'To fulfil God in life is man's manhood.' And if my memory doesn't fail me, you said in your *Life Divine:* 'We must accept the many-sidedness of the Manifestation even while we assert the unity of the Manifested."

"It is true that I am a believer in *lila,*" he nodded. "But why exactly do you refer to that?"

"I wanted to make sure whether you really meant what you wrote in your *Yogic Sadhan.* I hope, too, that your yoga doesn't make it binding on one to live like a cave-dweller who disowns the many-mooded, active life or, shall we say, like a passive pensioner whose day is done? This hope, happily, has been fostered by your repudiation of *mayavada.*"

"I see what you mean," he said, giving me an indulgent smile. "Well, yes, I am not a *mayavadi,* happily, for you as well as for me. But, incidentally, I am not the author of the book *Yogic Sadhan.*"

"How do you mean?"

"Haven't you heard of automatic writing?"

"Planchette?"

"Not exactly. I merely held the pen while a disembodied being wrote off what he wished, using my pen and hand."

"May I ask why you lent yourself to such writing?"

"At the time I was trying to find out how much of truth and how much of subliminal suggestion from the submerged consciousness there might be in phenomena of this kind."))

"But let that pass," he added. "To return to your main question. You asked about the active life. Well, it isn't binding on you to renounce all that you value in your active life. What you must be ready to renounce is attachment to *everything* on that plane whether you live within or outside the wheel of karma, action. For if you keep these attachments, the Light from above will not be able to work unhampered to effect the radical transformation of your nature."

"Does that imply that I must forego, say, all human sympathy and true friendship, all joy of life and fellow-feeling?"

"It doesn't. ((Absence of love and fellow-feeling is not necessary to the Divine nearness, on the contrary a sense of closeness and oneness with others is a part of the Divine consciousness into which the *Sadhaka* enters by nearness to the Divine and the feeling of oneness with the Divine. An entire rejection of all relations is indeed the final aim of the *Mayavadin* and in the ascetic yoga an entire loss of all relations of friendship and affection and attachment to the world and its living beings would be regarded as a promising sign of advance towards liberation, *moksha*. But even there, I think a feeling of oneness and unattached spiritual sympathy for all is at least a penultimate stage, like the compassion of the Buddhist before turning to moksha or nirvana."))*

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* Sri Aurobindo wrote once to me in 1934: ". . . nor is friendship or affection excluded from the yoga. . . . Only we seek to found them on a surer basis than that on which the bulk of human friendships are insecurely founded. It is precisely because we hold friendship, brotherhood, love, to be sacred things that we want this change, because we do not want to see them broken at every moment by the movements of the ego, soiled and spoiled and destroyed by the passions, jealousies and treacheries to which the vital is prone: it is to

This decided me: I wanted to draw him out further.

"I would ask you to bear with me a little," I made bold to say, "and give me a patient hearing. My difficulty is that I have lived and loved life amply and I believe, intensely. But in my boyhood I came under the influence of Sri Ramakrishna's mysticism. As a result this certitude germinated in my mind that he had touched the bedrock of Truth with the categorical assertion that 'the object of human living is to achieve Divine union.' Then," I went on to say, "I fell within the orbit of the Western this-worldiness with all its spell and glamour and romance, luxuriating in living and in making the most of life and nature. I did not stop to think that the wealth of sunshine might have a worthier message for us than that of goading us to make a few paltry pleasures of hay. I made haste to snatch what I could before the shadows closed in. In my own case, however, they crept in even before sunset, for my vital enthusiasm waned quickly and the old starry perception of my boyhood re-emerged. It said in clear accents: it isn't any of these—wealth or youth, fame or family, action or art—no, not even service to the community or country, but only the Divine, nothing but His unique touch that can impart significance to it all, since He is the sole reality, all the rest is a mimicry, a shadow-dance."

"On my return from Europe," I continued, "I became popular and made friends, numerous friends—thanks to my patrimony, musical gifts, social qualities and lastly the pathetic awe and esteem that people feel when you can talk glibly about continental culture in continental languages. But strangely enough, among my numerous friends I met none interested in God or things of the spirit unless diluted with big doses of coloured art and

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make them truly sacred and secure that we want them rooted in the soul founded on the rock of the Divine. Our yoga is not an ascetic yoga: it aims at purity, but not at a cold austerity."

popular humanism, with the sole exception of Ronald Nixon, an English Professor of Lucknow. Thus it was a foreigner who discussed with me the wisdom of our authentic spirituality. It was he who first told me about your great yogic stature and made me read your books. Since meeting him my old nostalgia for the spiritual life has reasserted itself with redoubled force and I cannot rest in peace without the inner harmony which only the Spirit can give. In other words, I want to practise yoga. But then here I have the deepest misgivings as to my capacity. And I have had this persistent feeling that I can never succeed without a Guru and that Guru must be no other than yourself, even though I don't know whether *you* will accept me. That is *my* position. But the trouble is that Life, too, calls me with her coloured lanterns as you must have inferred yourself from my questions regarding social give-and-take, sympathy, love, friendship, etc., with all their attendant obligations and responsibilities. To stake all that for something that has not yet crystallized in my consciousness—or maybe that the dilemma lies in this that the satisfaction that these social pleasures give, though fast dwindling, are yet too tangible to be dismissed out of hand? Anyhow the prospect of having to do without my chains causes a strange malaise. I say strange, because I can't quite account for the tug-of-war that is going on within me—a conflict which is quite concrete even when the forces seem so imponderable. But I don't know if I have been able to put it all clearly before you?"

I paused as he smiled kindly, his deep glance spraying a kind of peace upon me . . . giving me a feeling of his compassion . . . not a mere human compassion but something far more pervasive and soothing.

"I quite understand," he said reassuringly. "It is like this ((Human society, human friendship, love, affection, fellow-feeling are mostly and usually—not entirely or in all cases—founded on a vital basis and are ego-held at their centre. It is because of the pleasure of being loved, the pleasure of enlarging the ego by contact and penetration with another, the exhilaration of the vital interchange which feeds their personality, that men usually love and there are also other and still more selfish motives that mix with this essential movement. There are of course higher spiritual, psychic, mental, vital elements that can come in; but the whole thing is very mixed even at its best. This is the reason why at a certain stage with or without apparent reason the world and life and human society and philanthropy—which is as ego-ridden as the rest—begin to pall.

"There is sometimes," he continued, "an ostensible reason—a disappointment of the surface-vital, the withdrawal of affection by others, the perception that those loved, or men generally, are not what one thought them to be and a host of other causes. But often the cause is a secret disappointment of some part of the inner being, not translated or not well translated into the mind, because it expected from these things something they cannot give. For some it takes the form of a *vairagya*, which drives them towards ascetic indifference and gives the urge towards *moksha*. For us what we hold to be necessary is that the mixture should disappear and that the consciousness should be established on a purer level."))

"Till then," he went on after a pause, "love and affection and sympathy and friendship could not yield to us their full quota in significance and joy, because for that their basis has to be spiritual, their foundation pure. But for such a consummation there must be a transmutation of the very substance of our human nature. It is only then that the rhythm and mode of its self-expression can change when the lead will have been taken by the psychic self in us. When this self of ours comes to the forefront, it will express in the truest way the authentic movements of the deeper emotions which are of the psychic. This is, in a nutshell, the inner message of my yoga." *

"Consequently," he added, "this must be the ideal, your ideal, that is, if you would practise yoga, bearing in mind that you mustn't be bound by anything that is irrelevant to your aspiration for the Divine. Nothing—no attachment however laudable—must be a rival to your aspiration for the Divine."

"But is that possible—I mean feasible, for me?"

"Not at the start: if it were, you would be a liberated being already. You can't achieve liberation overnight. What I wanted to stress was that if you cared for yoga you must always hold on to your vision, your ideal of inner liberation, so that you may be ready to comply whenever you are called upon to forego anything that militates against this ideal."

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* Sri Aurobindo wrote to me later explaining the action of the psychic: "The psychic is the soul, the Divine spark animating matter and life and mind and as it grows, it takes form and expresses itself through these, touching them to beauty and fineness—it works even before humanity, in the lower creation leading it up towards the human, in humanity it works more freely though still under a mass of ignorance and weakness and coarseness and hardness leading it up towards the Divine. In yoga it becomes conscious of its aim and turns inward to the Divine. It sees behind and above it—that is the difference. . . . Affection, love, tenderness, are in their nature psychic, —the vital has them because the psychic is trying to express itself through the vital. It is through the emotional being that the psychic most easily expresses itself, it stands just behind it in the heart-centre. But it wants these things to be pure. Not that it rejects the outward expression through the vital and the physical, but as the psychic being is from the soul, it naturally feels the attraction of soul to soul, the nearness of soul to soul, the union of soul with soul as the things that are to it most abiding and concrete. Mind, vital, body are means of expression and very precious means of expression but the inner life is for it the first thing, the deepest reality and these have to be subordinated to it and conditioned by it—its expression, its instrument and channel."

"But must I necessarily be called upon to forego—everything?"

"You may not be—outwardly, that is," he said. "But that won't make any very material difference, since your inner attitude has to be that of complete freedom all the same—the ideal must be *nirliptata,* non-attachment. If you can be truly non-attached within, you need not have to tear off the outward strappings of bondage. But remember that you must always be ready to shove aside anything that is incompatible with yoga, for that surely is one of its major conditions."

"Does that apply to things that do not, properly speaking, belong to the material plane, say music which I love so dearly? Must I renounce that too?"

"I haven't said you *must,*" he smiled again indulgently, "only, if yoga were the central thing in your life you would not be so nervous at the prospect of having to give up music for its sake, would you?"

I hung my head discountenanced.

"I would not have you infer," I pleaded, "that I couldn't possibly give up music. Only I am not yet persuaded that yoga will make it up to me. My problem may be somewhat naive but it is a problem none the less. It is like this: I don't find it hard to give up a lower thing for a higher one provided I have some foretaste of the latter. But so long as I have no clear idea of what yoga has to give, why must I gamble away the tangible for the elusive? Before I burn my boats can't I legitimately claim even a glimpse of what the deep has in store for me?"

"Didn't I tell you just now that you need not *necessarily* give up your music or something just as tangible for that matter: what is obligatory is that should any activity or idea or habit or attachment or preconception prove an impediment on the way, you have to discard it when so required."

"But you haven't answered my question about the compensation. Or perhaps it is taboo to have such an intellectual curiosity or scepticism, if you will?"

"Not quite, only yoga, you must know, is not a matter of intellectual appraisement or recognition: it is essentially a matter of realization through self-dedication. As for your other question, surely the compensations of yoga are deep as well as abiding. Only, you can't summon them to prove their validity before your mental dock. But let me tell you here that your difficulties aren't what you presume them to be: I mean they are not mental at bottom. The truth of the matter is this: so long as the joys which belong to the lower planes continue to be too vividly real and covetable you will find ready enough reasons why you shouldn't decline them. You can forego them only when you have had a call of the higher joys, when the lower ones begin to pall, sound hollow. The Promised Land of the Spirit begins from the frontier of worldly enjoyments, to start with."

"But why is it," I asked after a pause, "that one can't expect to have even a glimpse beforehand of this Land? Because of the thick walls of our worldly desires?"

"Your premise here is not quite correct," he objected. "For even when we live in the world of these desires the glimpse, the call, comes to us through chinks and rifts of dissatisfaction and surfeit. Only, it doesn't last long until you are somewhat purified, for then only do you really begin to be open to it. The darkness returns intermittently after the light because it takes long to get our whole being open to the light. That is why yoga pushes us urgently upwards to altitudes where the light can be shut out no more by clouds. And it is just because yoga is such an ascent, of consciousness, that any attachment to or desire for lures and prizes on the lower planes, material, intellectual or aesthetic, must eventually prove a shackle."

"Why then do you write so appreciatively of materialism as also of the intellectual and aesthetic delights? And why are your own writings so illuminating intellectually? Why have you praised art? Why write at all: 'The highest aim of the aesthetic being is to find the Divine through Beauty?' " *

"Why not? Intellect, art, poetry, knowledge of matter, etc., can all help our progress appreciably provided you direct them properly. It is at bottom, a case of evolution. That is why I once wrote: 'Reason was the helper, Reason is the bar'; which means simply that our intellect can be a help in our evolution only a part of the way. But when it presumes to judge what is beyond its domain, it must be put in its place. Besides, different recipients are differently constituted for different disciplines—seeking different fulfilments, each approaching truth in the way of his nature, *swabhava*. To put it in other words, those who are best recipients for the light of the intellect are *mentally* more evolved than those who are not so gifted intellectually. But that doesn't mean that there are no realizations

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* Cf. "But first, it is well that we should recognize the enormous, the indispensable utility of the very brief period of rationalistic Materialism through which humanity has been passing. For that vast field of evidence and experience which begins to re-open its gates to us, can only be safely entered when the intellect has been severely trained to a clear austerity; seized on by unripe minds, it lends itself to the most perilous distortions and misleading imaginations and actually in the past encrusted a real nucleus of truth with such an accretion of perverting superstitions and irrationalising dogmas that all advance in true knowledge was rendered impossible. It became necessary for a time to make a clean sweep at once of the truth and its disguise in order that the road might be clear for a new departure and a surer advance. The rationalistic tendency of MaMaterialism has done mankind this great service. . . . If modern Materialism were simply an unintelligent acquiescence in the material life, the advance might be indefinitely delayed. But since its very soul is the search for knowledge, it will be unable to cry halt; as it reaches the barriers of sense-knowledge and of the reasoning from sense-knowledge, its very rush will carry it beyond."

The Life Divine

higher than the mental ones. Assuredly there are, as we can concretely verify as we open ourselves to the realizations of the Spirit, when we find the mental joys, inadequate, the aesthetic joys no longer satisfying. With this opening we glimpse worlds higher than those we have been used to. Do you follow?"

"You mean that yoga enlarges our consciousness more and more?"

"That is my view of evolution," he nodded, "this gradual unfolding of the consciousness ascending to its higher reaches ((And it is yoga which is to bring down further light and power in the next step of human evolution —the next stage of the evolution of human consciousness.))"

I reverted to my difficulty: "But what about my taking to yoga?"

"Everybody can practise some yoga or other, suited to his nature," he replied non-committally.

"But my question was about your Integral yoga—of self-surrender."

"Ah!" he said slowly as though weighing his words. "About that I can't pronounce here and now."

"But why?"

"Because the yoga that I have been pursuing of late—whose aim is the entire and radical transformation of the stuff and fabric of our consciousness and being including our physical nature—is a very arduous one, fraught with grave perils at every step. ((In fact so great are these dangers that I would not advise anybody to run them unless his call is so urgent that he is prepared to stake everything.)) In other words, I can accept only those with whom yoga has become such a necessity that nothing else seems worth while. In your case it hasn't yet become so urgent. Your seeking is for some sort of partial elucidation of life's mysteries. This is at best an intellectual seeking—not an urgent need of the central being."

"Allow me to explain a little further," I said with a keen sense of disappointment, "for I am afraid you haven't quite seen where the shoe pinches. I can assure you that mine is not merely a mental curiosity—"

"I said *seeking*, not *curiosity*," he corrected. "And I referred to the present only: I did not mean this could not develop later on into a real need of your central being."

"Let me make it more explicit all the same," I insisted. "From 1919 till 1922 I was in Europe meeting many thoughtful people including a few notable thinkers. Each of these I prodded with the one test-query: 'What is the truth of truths?' I have all along felt, with the Gita, that the truth-seeker must approach the Wise—the *Tatwadarshi*—with *'homage, enquiry and service.'* I have indeed gained a great deal through contacts of men like Bertrand Russell, Romain Rolland, Mahatma Gandhi, Tagore, Duhamel, and many others who are less celebrated but highly evolved personalities. To all of them I owe a debt of deep gratitude. But I have reached no solution of life's master problem—none could point me the way to it. I continued to be tormented by life's endless tragedies and sorrows and disharmonies; I was pained by the senseless wastefulness of Nature's ways and what chiefly troubled me was the persistent fact that mankind in the mass should go on preferring evil to good, falsehood to truth, darkness to light. Time and again have I asked myself if we must go on for ever groping in vain for a panacea to it all, if there was no real remedy to the 'ills our flesh is heir to.' If there was, how was it that we, the children of Immortality should never chance upon it through centuries of striving? And why should we still be clamouring and scrambling for the ephemeral—often, alas, even the infernal—instead of the everlasting good? Besides, I used to ask myself—" I pulled up suddenly, somewhat abashed for my effusion.

"Go on," he said in a very kind tone, "I am listening."

"I well remember," I resumed, encouraged, "how, whenever I came in contact with somebody out of the ordinary, I used to hear a distinct voice deep down within me: 'But has he achieved his poise in the ultimate Truth? Has he realized lasting peace?" And an answering voice returned with equal distinctness: 'No.' There was but one exception. I have told you I came early under the influence of Sri Ramakrishna. Whenever I used to meditate before his picture I used to have a deep certitude that *he* had attained *'yam labhadwa paramam labham manyate nadhikam tath'*—'the boon of boons beside which all others look like baubles.' And this certitude came again with the same rhythm of deep joy when I saw you just now—but I'm afraid I am getting too autobiographical—"

"It is all right, go on."

"I used often to probe my soul with the questioning: how to attain that poise—*yasmin sthito na duhkhena gurunapi vichalyate*—which made one impervious to life's hardest blows—and gave one the unshakable foundation of eternal peace and bliss? Music gave me a brief foretaste—though even there by snatches—of such felicity, that is why I have loved music passionately since my childhood. With age this love grew; yet I was continually visited by an anxious questioning whether it was justifiable to seek refuge in the delightful retreats of art in a world where suffering was so widespread and tragically persistent? At times a sob came up: was there really no way of changing this—no way of release from these dark underworlds of pain and misery into radiant spheres of joy and happiness? If not, then what sense can there be in any human endeavour? Have we to accept, after all, the findings of the *mayavadis* as the ultimate verdict of human experience that no stable haven of fulfilment is attainable in the conditions to which we are born?" I stopped suddenly dead, somewhat abashed by my crescendo of rhetoric of which I had suddenly become conscious.

Sri Aurobindo fixed on me a long gaze. An ineffable radiance of compassionate sympathy suffused his face . . . his eyes gleamed like jewels shedding light without heat. I knew he had understood. Hasn't he written in a poem about his own yearning in face of human sorrows:

Rose of God, vermilion stain on the sapphires of heaven,
Rose of Bliss, fire-sweet, seven-tinged with the ecstasies seven!
Leap up in our heart of humanhood, O miracle, O flame,
Passion-flower of the Nameless, bud of the mystical Name.

Rose of God, great wisdom-bloom on the summits of being,
Rose of Light, immaculate core of the ultimate seeing!
Live in the mind of our earthhood, O golden mystery, flower,
Sun on the head of the Timeless, guest of the marvellous hour.

Rose of God, damask force of Infinity, red icon of might,
Rose of power with thy diamond halo piercing the night!
Ablaze in the will of the mortal, design the wonder of thy plan,
Image of Immortality, outbreak of the Godhead in man.

Rose of God, smitten purple with the incarnate divine desire,
Rose of Life, crowded with petals, colour's lyre!
Transform the body of the mortal like a sweet and magical rhyme;
Bridge our earthhood and heavenhood, make deathless the children of Time.

Rose of God like a blush of rapture on Eternity's face,
Rose of Love, ruby depth of all being, fire-passion of Grace!
Arise from the heart of the yearning that sobs in Nature's abyss;

Make earth the home of the Wonderful and life Beatitude's kiss.

"I quite see your difficulty," he said softly. "For I too wanted at one time to transform through my yoga the face of the world. My aim was to change the fundamental nature and movements of humanity, to exile all the evils which afflict helpless mortality."

I felt a heave within—in my very blood. For one like him to talk so intimately to a stranger! Gratitude surged within me and I hung upon his words, eager to imbibe the sweet cadences of his liquid voice.

"It was with this aspiration that I turned to yoga in the beginning," he added, "and I came to Pondicherry because I had been directed by the Voice to pursue my yoga here."

"I read in the famous letters you wrote to your wife that you had turned to yoga to save our country."

"That's right. I told Lele when agreeing to follow his instructions that I would do his yoga only on condition that it didn't interfere with my poetry and service to the country."

"And then?"

"Lele agreed and gave me initiation. But soon afterwards he left, bidding me turn solely to my inner guidance.

"Since then," he went on, "I have followed only this inner Voice which has led me to develop what I named the Integral yoga. It was then that my outlook changed with the knowledge born of my new yogic consciousness. But then I found, to my utter disillusionment, that it was only my ignorance which had led me to believe that the impossible was feasible here and now."

"Ignorance?"

He nodded. "Because I didn't realise then that in order to help humanity out it was not enough for an individual, however great, to achieve an ultimate solution individually: humanity has to be ripe for it too. For the crux of the difficulty is that even when the Light is ready to descend it cannot come to stay until the lower plane is also ready to bear the pressure of the Descent."

I was reminded of what he had written in his *Essays on the Gita*: "No real peace can be till the heart of man deserves peace; the law of Vishnu cannot prevail till the debt to Rudra is paid . . . Teachers of the land of love and Oneness there must be, for by that way must come the ultimate salvation, but not till the Time-Spirit in man is ready, can the inner and the ultimate prevail over the outer and immediate reality. Christ and Buddha have come and gone but it is Rudra who still holds the world in the hollow of his hand."

"Consequently," he went on, "the utmost you can do, here and now is to communicate only partially the light of your realisations in proportion as people are receptive. Even this is not very easy, mind you; for the fact of your having received something does not necessarily make you capable of making a free gift of it to others. You see, capacity to receive is one kind of aptitude, capacity to give—quite another. Indeed, the latter is a very special kind of gift. Some there are who can only imbibe but not communicate, because, for one thing, what you communicate, everybody cannot receive, even when they earnestly want to. To sum up, the number of those is very limited who are capable both of giving and receiving. So you can understand the problem is by no means a simple one. What is one to do? Everybody does not want bliss or enlightenment: men are at different stages of development and this makes any universal panacea for life's evils an impossibility as the history of human experience has proved again and again."

I was reminded of the story of the sceptic who asked the Buddha why he did not confer his gift of *nirvana* on all and sundry here and now if he was really convinced of its efficacy in this sorrow-ridden world. Buddha simply asked him to go round from door to door enquiring what they severally wanted. He came back and reported that the boons coveted were endless: money, power, fame, children, women, health, beauty, long life and so on. "But what about *nirvana?*" asked Buddha. "Did anybody want it?"—"Not one," he replied. "Well," Buddha smiled, "how can I force a boon on people who won't have it?"

"But what about the widespread misery and fear and suffering?" I said after a pause.

"How can you help that so long as men choose as they do to hug ignorance which is at the root of all suffering? As long as they cherish the darkness of attachment rather than the light of liberation and knowledge, how can they expect to see? How would you evade the inexorable law of *karma?*"

"What are you then striving for through your yoga? I asked. "For your own liberation or fulfilment?"

"No," he said, "that wouldn't have taken so long. But," he added, "it is not possible to answer you more convincingly just now, for if I were to tell you why I am doing yoga, you would either not understand or misunderstand. Suffice it to say that I want to invoke here on earth the light of a higher world, to manifest a new power which will continue to exist as a new influence in the physical world and will be a direct manifestation of the Divine in our entire being and daily life."

"Is this what you have named the Supramental Divine?"

"That's right—though the name is immaterial. What matters is to remember that for a variety of reasons the direct action of the Supramental has never yet been brought to bear on our earth-nature and consciousness."

"Because the time was not favourable for such a descent?"

"Partly; but there were other reasons also which I can't go into as they cannot be communicated through mental language, and so, if attempted, may only lead to fresh mystification."

He wrote to me later, in 1933 about the functioning of the Supramental: "What the Supramental will do, the mind cannot foresee or lay down. The mind is Ignorance seeking for the Truth, the Supramental by its very definition is the Truth-consciousness: Truth in possession of itself and fulfilling itself by its own power. In a Supramental world imperfection and disharmony are bound to disappear. But what we propose just now is not to make the earth a Supramental world but to bring down the Supramental as a Power and established consciousness in the midst of the rest—to let it work there and fulfil itself as Mind descended into life and matter has worked as a Power there to fulfil itself in the midst of the rest. This will be enough to change the world and to change Nature by breaking down her present limits. But what, how, by what degrees it will do it is a thing that ought not to be said now—when the Light is there, the Light itself will do its work—when the Supramental Will stands on earth, that Will will decide."

"But tell me at least if the yogis of yore knew of this Power."

"Some did.* But—how can I put the truth of the matter to you?—what happened was that they used to rise individually to this plane and stay there in union: they didn't bring it down to act upon our terrestrial consciousness. Perhaps they did not even attempt to. But I would rather not tell you more about this because, as I said, the mind cannot even glimpse the Supramental Truth, to say nothing of understanding it."

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* "There is a Permanent, a Truth hidden by a Truth where the Sun unyokes his horses. The ten hundreds (of his rays) came together—That One. I saw the most glorious of the Forms of the Gods."

(Sri Aurobindo's translation from the Rig-Veda V. 62-1.)

"But, forgive me, isn't the world going from bad to worse daily—nay, hourly? I am an unrepentant rationalist—realist—I hope you will pardon me for saying this?"

"I will," he said smiling. "For I myself have stressed repeatedly this desperate plight of the earth. And the conditions will become more desperate still. ((The usual idea of the occultists about it is that the worse they are the more probable is the coming of an intervention or a new revelation from above. The ordinary mind cannot know: it has either to believe or disbelieve—wait and see."))

I was reminded of the Gita's message that whenever there is in this world a shipwreck of the spiritual values through the upsurge of rebel Darkness, the Divine incarnates himself again to restore the reign of victorious Light.

"But on whom and what will this Supramental work?" I asked.

"Why, on our life-material of course—down to matter and the physical."

"Didn't the ancient yogis attempt this either?"

"Not with the Supramental instrumentation. Their preoccupation was not so much with our basic material-physical, because to transform it with the spiritual force is the most difficult of all achievements. But that is precisely why it must be achieved."

"But does the Divine seriously want some such big thing to be achieved?"

"Unquestionably. ((As to whether the Divine seriously means something to happen, I believe it is intended. I know with absolute certitude that the Supramental is a truth and that its advent is in the nature of things inevitable. The question is as to the when and the how. That also is decided and predestined from somewhere above; but it is here being fought out amid rather a grim clash of conflicting forces.))"

"Forgive me, I don't quite follow this."

"I know," he intervened. "For it is somewhat abstruse. It is like this. ((In the terrestrial world the predetermined result is hidden and what we see is a whirl of possibilities and forces attempting to achieve something with the destiny of it all concealed from human eyes. This is however certain that a number of souls have been sent to see that it shall be now. That is the situation. My faith and will are all for the now. I am speaking of course on the level of human intelligence—mystically—rationally, as one might put it."))

"Please be a little more explicit."

"To say more would be going beyond the line."

"But tell me at least when the miracle will happen."

"You don't want me to start prophesying. As a rationalist, you can't."

So I pursued another line. "You have written in your *Synthesis of Yoga*," I said, "that we mustn't turn our back on the material world because it is so incurably recalcitrant to the light of the spirit."

I quote the passage below: "The obstacle which the physical presents to the spiritual is no argument for the rejection of the physical; for in the unseen providence of things our greatest difficulties are our best opportunities. A supreme difficulty is Nature's indication to us of a supreme conquest to be won and an ultimate problem to be solved; it is not a warning of an inexplicable snare to be shunned or of an enemy too strong for us from whom we must flee."

He smiled and nodded.

"But tell me one thing," I said, flying off at another tangent, "didn't any of your predecessors make this attempt—I mean what you call the integral transformation of the physical consciousness?"

"The attempt might have been made, it is not certain. But what is certain is that nothing decisive was achieved on the physical plane."

"How do you infer that?"

"Because all achievements leave some legacy of traces for posterity to follow up. A spiritual realisation once completely achieved could never be wholly obliterated afterwards."

"You must then realise it yourself first?"

"Obviously. Be it a new realisation or light or idea—it must first descend in one person from whom it radiates out in widening circles to others. Hasn't the Gita too said that the ways of the best of men act as models to the rest? In the Integral yoga, however, the work starts after the realisation, whereas in most other yogas it ends with the realisation. The reason is that I aim primarily at manifestation for which I must, obviously, reach the Supramental myself before I can bring it to bear on our earth-consciousness. For this, ascent has to be the first step—descent is the next."

"How will the descent work, to start with?"

"When the Supramental touches our being, our consciousness will overpass its twilit stage of the mental (where the divine Truth is distorted) into the upper regions where light has free play—that is, where there are no such distortions. This will in its turn bring about the transformation of mind, life and body as that will be one of the functions of the Force at its inception in the world of matter, generally, to usher in subsequently the new era in man's living.† You must not misunderstand me.

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† He said in a later message (5-5-30): "Our yoga is a double movement of ascent and descent; one rises to higher levels of consciousness, but at the same time one brings down their power not only into the mind and life, but in the end even into the body. And the highest of these levels, the one at which it ends, is the supermind. Only when that can be brought down is a divine transformation possible in the earth-consciousness."

What I want to achieve is the bringing down of the Supramental to bear on this being of ours so as to raise it to a level higher than the mental and from there change and sublimate the workings of mind, life and body. But this is not to say that the Supramentalisation will be effectuated overnight so that all will be completely transformed. That is hardly feasible."

"Because we are not mature for such a transformation?"

"Not only that—there are other obstinate impediments and hostile forces to reckon with. This world of matter has been for ages the bulwark of darkness, falsehood's most redoubtable citadel where, hitherto, inertia has reigned supreme. To carry there the message of Truth, to make it responsive to the shock of Light is far from easy. Yet the Supramental power can work its way if once it can descend there, that is to say if once the earth-consciousness can bear it to start with."

"Suppose it does, on whom will the Force be dynamic in its inception?"

"On those who have acquired the power to be its medium or vehicle. Each of these will serve as an indicator of what humanity is potentially capable of becoming, once it is transformed.* Do you follow?"

"After a fashion I suppose," I said. "But tell me please, if this power or influence will benefit many or only a handful of isolated individuals here and there."

"Many, certainly. My integral yoga would be of little use if it were meant for one or two individuals. For you must remember that my object is not the abandonment of the physical-material life to drift by itself but to transform it fundamentally by the power of this higher light and seeing." *

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* "The error of the practical reason is an excessive subjection to the apparent fact which it can immediately feel as real and an insufficient courage in carrying profounder facts of potentiality to their logical conclusion. What is, is the realisation of an anterior potentiality; present potentiality is a clue to future realisation."
Chapter 7 . . . *The Life Divine.*

"But I hope your followers and successors won't have to emulate you in your superhuman sadhana, if they are to arrive?"

"No," Sri Aurobindo smiled, "and that was what I really meant when I said some time back that my yoga was meant for humanity. The first that hews his way through a trackless jungle acts necessarily as the pathfinder clearing the way for his followers. He faces much to make it easier for the others."

I was reminded of a saying of the great yogi Sri Ramakrishna: "The man who makes a fire has to take a lot of trouble but, once lit, all who come near may safely reap the benefit of its warmth." As I pondered the significance of this simile, a deep sense of reverence pervaded my being in the ensuing silence. What I had heard had slowly infiltrated into the depths of my being. I wondered how few among us even imagined that such a man was living in our midst! But then hasn't it always been so from time immemorial? How many of us had truly appraised the greatness of Sri Ramkrishna in his life-time? I felt suddenly a strong impulse to make him my *pranam* once more. I restrained myself with effort.

Sri Aurobindo's gaze was on me, unwaveringly. Suddenly I felt a curious upsurge of scepticism so utterly out of tune with my nascent adoration.

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* "Since our divine perfection embraces the realization of ourselves in being, in life and in love through others as well as through ourselves, extension of our Liberty and its results in others would be the inevitable outcome as well as the broadest utility of our liberation and perfection. Nor would the integrality to which we aspire be real or even possible, if it were confined to the individual."

Synthesis of Yoga.

"But are you convinced it will be possible—really feasible?" I said.

"For a single individual I have *seen* it to be possible," he put an emphasis on 'seen.' "For I have *seen* the working of this tremendous victorious force annihilating at a sweep the force of darkness and inertia which conspire to keep the spirit under the thrall of matter and flesh. To give a concrete instance: a yogi could here and now achieve complete immunity from the forces of disease if he could isolate himself completely from his surroundings."

"But why does he fail when he reverts to the world?"

"Because of the universal suggestion of disease when he comes out of his seclusion."

My scepticism took yet another line. "But do you think this to be such a great achievement after all, seeing that even the great Buddha attached so little importance to the physical aspect of our suffering?"

"You forget Buddha had a different outlook on life, a different object. He wanted through *nirvana* a final exit from this phenomenal world of the senses. It may be that at that stage of our human evolution man was not mature yet for a greater realization. But whatever the reason, you cannot get away from the fact that Buddha wanted fulfilment by turning away from all play of expression which is Life's mode of self-manifestation, whereas I want its transformation, complete transformation. My aim is not to disown life but to transmute it through the alchemy of the light of the Spirit. ((In other words my aim is not to cast off the material life, but to conquer Matter for the Spirit: to make the body a conscious and perfect instrument instead of a limitation and an obstacle must therefore be an essential part of this aim.))

For some time I did not know what to say next. Then a sort of curiosity—or shall I say eagerness—got the better of me in spite of my misgivings.

"But what about my yoga?" I brought myself to say apropos of nothing. The next moment I felt a strange self-questioning: was I really calling for an answer? I could not quite decide.

His glance cut into me like a knife. "Yours is still a mental seeking," he said. "For my yoga something more is needed. Why not wait till the time comes?"

"When it does, may I count on your help?" I asked, anxiously.

He nodded and smiled.

At that time he had only about a dozen disciples in his Ashram. In point of fact, it had not yet grown into a proper Ashram. It was very different from the Ashram today with more than seven hundred initiates of both sexes within it. But even at that time the Guru gave the disciples all the help they needed. The few who were there spoke enthusiastically about his yoga, his elevating personal contact and loving help and wisdom born of his great realization. Some of his beautiful letters were lent to me and I copied them out with eagerness. Among these there was his famous letter, written in November 1922, to the late Deshbhandu Chitta Ranjan Das, beloved of Bengal. I must quote a few lines:

"Dear Chitta,

I think you know my present idea and the attitude towards life and work to which it has brought me. I see more and more manifestly that man cannot get out of the futile cycle the race is always treading, until he has raised himself on to a new foundation. I have become confirmed in a perception which I had always, less clearly and dynamically then, but which has now become more and more evident to me, that the true basis of work and life is the spiritual: that is to say, a new consciousness to be developed only by yoga. But what precisely was the nature of the dynamic power of this greater consciousness? What was the condition of its effective truth? How could it be brought down, mobilised, organised, turned upon life? How could our present instruments—intellect, life, mind, body—be made true and perfect channels for this great transformation? This was the problem I have been trying to work out in my own experience and I have now a sure basis, a wide knowledge and some mastery of the secret . . . I have still to remain in retirement. For I am determined not to work in the external field till I have the sure and complete possession of this new power of action—not to build except on a perfect foundation."

I shall never forget the cumulative effect of our first meeting nor the avidity with which I read those letters again and again that night. And the thrill, almost of romance! Sri Aurobindo's yoga and its message at first hand! I could not sleep that night—for sheer joy. How could one sleep after having seen his radiant face with eyes like stars!

I went to him again the next morning.

"I read again and again your letter to Deshbandhu Das," I said without circumlocution. "I have a few questions to ask, if you will allow me."

He smiled kindly with an encouraging movement of the hand.

"You have made out in your letter a claim about yoga's power to develop a new consciousness. I would like to know if this consciousness is fruitful in any concrete results. If so, then can it be substantiated that such and such results have followed causally from such and such powers 'developed only through yoga' as you put it, and that they could not have happened otherwise?

"In other words, you want to have demonstrable objective verification of yogic forces to carry conviction to the laboratory scientist? Well, I am afraid these forces will not oblige him by becoming amenable to such tests. ((It is no use trying to *prove* that such and such a result was the effect of spiritual force. Each must form his own idea about that—for if it is accepted it cannot be *as a result of* proof and argument, but only as a result of experience, of faith or of that insight in the heart or the deeper intelligence which looks behind appearance and sees what is behind them. The spiritual consciousness does not claim in that way, it can state the truth about itself but not fight for a personal acceptance.)) *

"I should like to know," I said after a pause, "if what we do in life without the yogic inspiration has any lasting value or not?"

"I don't quite catch your drift," he said.

"I have in mind what we call *adesh*, by which Sri Ramakrishna meant, as you know, an explicit divine command

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* Cf. "For if we examine carefully, we shall find that intuition is our first teacher. Intuition always stands veiled behind our mental operations. Intuition brings to man those brilliant messages from the unknown which are the beginning of his higher knowledge. Reason only comes in afterwards to see what profit it can have of the shining harvest. . . . The sages of the Veda and Vedanta relied entirely upon intuition and spiritual experience. . . . The question asked by one thinker of another was 'What dost thou know?'—not 'What dost thou think?' nor 'To what conclusion has thy reasoning arrived?' . . . All these extensions of faculty, though received with hesitation and incredulity by the physical mind because they are abnormal to the habitual scheme of our ordinary life and experience . . . must yet be admitted, since they are the inevitable result of any attempt to enlarge the field of our superfically active consciousness." . . .

The Life Divine

or injunction to execute the Higher Will. He said again and again that it would be little use preaching a gospel unless and until you have received a sanction or a behest from above to that effect. But then haven't men acted through centuries in countless ways, expressing and fulfilling themselves in a variety of achievements without any such unmistakable direct injunction—as for example in science, art, philosophy, poetry, music, etc.? Has such work no lasting value at all?"

"Well," he said, "every work that is truly creative must have a more or less lasting value. In such functionings what happens is something like this." He stretched his left hand horizontally and added: "Suppose this is the plane of our activity—that is to say, the plane whereon we achieve something. Now when something is truly creative, its impulse comes from a plane of higher consciousness, say here,"—he pointed to his right hand suspended parallelly above the left—"even though the inspiration from this higher plane"—indicating the right hand—"has materialised in the lower" (the left). "That is why all truly creative work presupposes a *yoga* or junction of the lower plane of consciousness with a higher one, thus forging a link as it were between the inspiring and the recipient consciousness; it is, in other words, the translation of a truth or vision of a higher plane in the language of the lower."

This reminded me of a passage in his *Future Poetry*, which I quote here in full: "The voice of poetry comes from a region above us, a plane of our being above and beyond our personal intelligence, a supermind which sees things in their innermost and largest truth by a spiritual identity. It is the possession of the mind by the supramental touch and the communicated impulse to seize this sight and word that creates the psychological phenomenon of poetic inspiration and it is the invasion of it by a superior power to that which it is normally able to harbour that produces the temporary excitement of brain and heart and nerve which accompanies the inrush of the influence."

I felt a glow of self-satisfaction that I could grasp this better when I caught the deep-radiant gaze of his eyes once more. I thought I ought to say something, but did not know what to say.

"Then such work—as of art—is not altogether valueless?" I said as I could not think of anything better.

"Why should it be?" he said assuagingly. "Isn't it one of the accredited functions of true art to carry the message of the suprasensible worlds to our worlds of senses—in messages, rhythms, visions, symbols? True art must reveal what life conceals."

Years later he amplified it further in one of his letters to me:

"What a thing is to the exterior sense may not be, often is not beautiful for the ordinary aesthetic vision, but the Yogi sees in it something more which the external eye does not see: he sees the soul behind, the self and spirit . . . It may be said that he brings into the object something that is in himself, transmutes it by adding out of his own being to it—and the artist too does something of the same kind in another way . . . his is a transmuting vision because it is revealing vision: he discovers behind what the object appears to be the something more that it is . . . Is not the eye of the artist constantly catching some element of aesthetic value in the plain, the ugly, the sordid, the repellent and triumphantly conveying it through his material through the word, through line and colour, through the sculptured shape?"

"Besides," he continued, "It is and must be the purpose of all true creation to lift man from his lower planes of vision to the higher. It must mean some sort of release of consciousness, the same as in Yoga."

"But does it imply that such a release can make all men truly creative?"

"In a sense, yes: because yoga brings out the best that is latent in everyone, bringing to fruition his truest potentialities which so often lie dormant in him. The result is that he sees clearly what is his native *dharma*, the line of his true nature."

"Does this mean that yoga enables us to achieve all that we could never have achieved without it?"

"This would be a kind of crude overstatement even though yoga can and often does make the impossible possible, especially if the *adhara*—the agent—is fully receptive and mature. Only, such instruments are rare. But you mustn't confuse the issue. For the aim of true yoga is not to accomplish miracles, these are incidental: anyhow, the aim of my integral yoga must be the transmutation of every trait in us to its highest absolute through a one-pointed aspiration for Light and constant rejection of all those movements which hamper the transformation."

"Doesn't it follow from this as a corollary that yoga must improve the art of an artist?"

"Unquestionably—assuming of course that art is his true function, *swadharma*. For yoga leads, I repeat, to full consciousness of self-realisation and the light of this consciousness reveals to each of us where lies our truest fulfilment."

"But can't our intellect show it as well—I mean through the analysis of pure reason?"

"For one thing, you cannot have your reason act in anything like its native purity till you achieve some emancipation from desires and from the hold of the separative ego. For another, logical reasoning, being a lesser faculty than, say, intuition, to say nothing of spiritual illumination, can hardly act as the latter's substitute, far less be its corrective or judge. It is only yoga which can give you this essential purity from desires and freedom from the ego's domination."

"Just one more question, if you will reassure me that you will forgive my rationalist scepticism."

"Go ahead," he said with an amused smile.

"It is this," I said, carefully picking my words to avoid pitfalls, "we hear often enough of yogic miracles and the inconceivable powers, *vibhutis,* which yoga gives. I want to ascertain how far there is truth in such rumours and contentions. For I have seen a lot of trickery in the name of yoga which takes in the credulous and the undiscerning; these often do not know what they are talking about. I hope you won't mind my putting it rather bluntly—it may be that I have been somewhat westernised."

"You may have heard," he smiled, "that I too happen to know a thing or two about the West and Westernisation. I know their mentality well with its throw-away-the-baby too with the bath water attitude. Since mountebanks use trickery to exploit the supraphysical phenomena, therefore—they will argue—all such phenomena are frauds and stagecraft."

He paused and added in a lower key: "The position is simple enough, rationally: from the premise that there are fakes and masks of truth it does not logically follow that only the fake or the mask is, and not the truth. A revelation is rumoured about: there are many exaggerations in such rumours, quite often. Therefore, will you say, the fundamental fact of the revelation is to be put out of court? If you take up that position you cannot arrive at the kernel of any truth. All yogis know about the authenticity of the supraphysical powers of the *vibhutis.* The evidence in their favour is so unimpeachable that there can be no possible doubt about their authenticity."

"But what about the Western sifters of these evidence? They not only doubt it but reject it all, hook, line and sinker."

"But that is arbitrary," he said. "For they take up this *a priori* position that they won't admit of any evidence except that of our material consciousness. What is not amenable to our sense-experience, they say, is invalid, not all maybe, but a great many. But it has not paid: for people are of late being more and more forced to recognise that our life is really too vast and complex to be comprehended by such rigid hypotheses and arbitrary measurements. Moreover the phenomena which they call hoaxes and hallucinations cannot be so summarily dismissed. In fact they even cease to appear as miracles once you admit that many occult forces can, as they do, act through super-sensuous channels.* I was an agnostic too once—in Europe. But as soon as I first saw the actual translation of what is called the miraculous powers I had to part company with their arbitrary ways of demanding satisfaction and testing evidence."

"Just one last question. Is it true that making use of such powers is detrimental to truly spiritual life?"

"Not necessarily. It all depends on the one who uses them and on his motives. (The idea that Yogis do not or ought not to use such powers I regard as an ascetic superstition. I believe that all Yogis who have these powers do use them whenever they find that they are called on from within to do so. They may refrain if they think the use in a particular case is contrary to the Divine Will

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* What seems to us supernatural is in fact either a spontaneous irruption of the phenomenon of other Nature into physical Nature, or in the words of the occultist, a possession of the knowledge and power of the higher orders or grades of cosmic Being and Energy and the direction of their forces and processes towards the production of effects in the physical world by seizing on possibilities o inter-connection and means for a material effectuality."

Chapter XXIII, *The Life Divine*

or see that preventing one evil may be opening the door to a worse or for any other valid reason, but not from any general prohibitory rule. What is forbidden to anyone with a strong spiritual sense is to be a miracle-monger, performing extraordinary things for show, for gain, for fame, out of vanity or pride. It is forbidden to use powers from mere vital motives, to make an Asuric ostentation of them or to turn them into a support for arrogance, conceit, ambition or any other of the amiable weaknesses to which human nature is prone. It is because half-baked yogis so often fall into these traps of the hostile forces that the use of yogic powers is sometimes discouraged as harmful to the user.

"But it is mostly people who live much in the vital that so fall; with a strong, free and calm mind and a psychic nature that is awake and alive, such pettinesses are not likely to occur. As for those who can live in the true Divine consciousness, certain powers are not *powers* at all in that sense, not, that is to say, a *supernatural or abnormal,* but rather *normal* way of seeing and acting, part of the consciousness—and how can they be forbidden or refused to act according to their consciousness and its nature?

"I suppose, I have had myself an even more completely European education than you, and I have had too my period of agnostic denial, but from the moment I looked at these things I could never take the attitude of doubt and disbelief which was for so long fashionable in Europe. Abnormal, otherwise supraphysical experiences and powers, occult or yogic, have always seemed to me perfectly natural and credible. Consciousness in its very nature could not be limited by the ordinary physical human-animal consciousness: it must have other ranges. Yogic or occult powers are no more supernatural or incredible than is supernatural or incredible the power to write a great poem or compose great music; few people can do it, as things are: not even one in a million; for poetry and music come from the inner being and to write or to compose true and great things one has to have the passage clear between the outer mind and something in the inner being. It is the same with yogic consciousness and powers: the thing is to get the passage clear.)) Anyhow a truly liberated yogi will never put such powers at the service of his separative egoistic self with all its personal desires and ambitions, because he has none of these." *

There can, I think, be no fitter ending to this than an elevating vision of the Master from his *Life Divine*. In citing this I only follow a homely proverb of Bengal: '*Gangāpuijā gangājale*"—"to worship the sacred Ganges with her own waters." It is from the chapter entitled, "Man in the Universe."

"The universe and the individual are the two essential appearances into which the Unknowable descends and through which it has to be approached; for other intermediate collectivities are born only of their interaction. This descent of the supreme Reality is in its nature a self-concealing; and in the descent there are successive levels, in the concealing successive veils. Necessarily, the revelation takes the form of an ascent; and necessarily also the ascent and the revelation are both progressive. For each successive level of descent to the Divine is to man a stage in an ascension; each veil that hides the unknown God becomes for the God-lover and God-seeker an instrument of His unveiling. Out of the rhythmic slumber of material Nature unconscious of the Soul and the Idea that maintain the ordered activities of her energy even in her dumb and mighty material trance, the world struggles into the more quick, varied and disordered rhythm of life labouring on the verges of self-consciousness. Out of Life it struggles upward into Mind in which the unit becomes awake to itself and its world, and in that awakening the universe gains the leverage it required for its supreme work,—it gains self-conscious individuality. But Mind takes up the work to continue, not to complete it. It is a labourer of acute but limited intelligence who takes the confused materials offered by Life and, having improved, adapted, varied, classified according to its powers, hands them over to the supreme Artist of our divine manhood. That Artist dwells in Supermind; for supermind is superman. Therefore our world has yet to climb beyond Mind to a higher principle, a higher status, a higher dynamism in which universe and individual become aware of and possess that which they both are and therefore explained to each other, in harmony with each other, unified.

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* The liberated man has no personal hopes; he does not seize on things as his personal possessions; he receives what the Divine Will brings him, covets nothing, is jealous of none; what goes from him he allows to depart into the whirl of things without repining or grief or sense of loss. His heart and self are under perfect control; they are free from reaction and passion, they make no turbulent response to the touches of outward things." (From Sri Aurobindo's Message on 24-4-1931.)

"The ascent to the divine Life is the human journey, the Work of works, the acceptable Sacrifice. This alone is man's real business in the world and the justification of his existence, without which he would be only an insect crawling among other ephemeral insects on a speck of surface mud and water which has managed to form itself amid the appalling immensities of the physical universe."

* * *

LETTERS

Dilip,

Yes, Goethe goes much deeper than Shakespeare; he had an incomparably greater intellect than the English Poet and sounded problems of life and thought Shakespeare had no means of approaching even. But he was certainly not a greater poet; I do not find myself very ready to admit either that he is Shakespeare's equal. He wrote out of a high poetic intelligence but his style and movement nowhere came near the poetic power, the magic, the sovereign expression and profound or subtle rhythms of Shakespeare. Shakespeare was a supreme poet and one might almost say, nothing else; Goethe was by far the greater man and the greater brain, but he was a poet by choice, his mind's choice among its many high and effulgent possibilities, rather than by the very necessity of his being. He wrote his poetry as he did everything else with a great skill and an inspired subtlety of language, and effective genius but it was only part of his genius and not the whole. There is too a touch mostly wanting—the touch of an absolute, an intensely inspired or revealing inevitability; few quite supreme poets have that in abundance, in others it comes by occasional jets or flashes.

When I said there were no greater poets than Homer and Shakespeare, I was thinking of there essential force and beauty—not of the scope of their work as a whole; for there are poets greater in their range. The Mahabharata is from that point of view a far greater creation than the Illiad, the Ramayana than the Odyssey, and spread, either and both of them, their strength and their achievement over a larger field than the whole dramatic world of Shakespeare; both are built on an almost cosmic vastness of plan and take all human life (the Mahabharata all human thought as well) in their scope and touch too on things which the Greek and Elizabethan poets could not even glimpse. But as poets—as masters of rhythm and language and the expression of poetic beauty—Vyasa and Valmiki though not inferior, are not greater than either the English or the Greek poet. We leave aside for the moment the question whether the Mahabharata was not the creation of the mind of a people rather than of a single poet, for that doubt has been raised also with regard to Homer.

Sri Aurobindo

Guru!

I send you three translations in Bengali:—

(1) Poetess R's translation of your poem on God.

(2) My own translation of the same poem.

(3) My translation of Shelley's lines: "I can give not . . ."

Your comments, please.

DILIP

GOD
(Sri Aurobindo)

Thou who pervadest all the worlds below,
Yet sitst above!
Master of all who work and rule and know,
Servant of love!
Thou who disdainest not the worm to be,
Nor even the clod,
Therefore we know by that humility
That thou art God.

(Shelley)

I can give not what men call love.
But wilt thou accept not
The worship the heart lifts above
And the Heavens reject not:

The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow,
The devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow.

Dilip,

Your translation of the second verse of my poem seems to take away the force and idea-substance of the original and to substitute a sentimental pseudo-Rabindrian half-thought without much meaning in it. He who is the greatest of the great—'Mahato mahiyan'—does not disdain to dwell in the clod and the worm, and the vast impartiality shown in this humility is itself the very sign of the greatness of the Divine, that was the idea behind the verse. Does your rendering convey it?

About R's rendering, I am afraid it is not very satisfactory either. The idea is that Work and Knowledge and Power can only obey the Divine and give him service: Love alone can compel Him, because of course Love is self-giving and the Divine gives himself in return. As for the second verse it does not give the idea at all. To have no contempt for the clod or the worm does not indicate that the non-despiser is the Divine: such an idea would be absolutely meaningless and in the last degree feeble. Any yogi could have that equality or somebody much less than a yogi. The idea is that, being omnipotent, omniscient, infinite, supreme, the Divine does not seem to disdain to descend even into the lowest forms, the obscurest figures of Nature and animate them with the Divine Presence: that shows His Divinity. The whole sense has fizzled out in her translation.

As for your translation of Shelley's poem, Shelley says in substance: "Human vital love is a poor inferior thing, a counterfeit of true love, which *I* cannot offer to *you*. But there is a greater thing, a true psychic love, all worship and devotion, which men do not readily value, being led away by the vital glamour, but which the heavens do not reject though it is offered from something so far below them, so maimed and ignorant and sorrow-vexed as the human consciousness which is to the divine consciousness as the moth is to the star, as the night is to the day. And will you not accept this from me, you, who in your nature are kin to the Heavens, you, who seem to me to have something of the divine nature, to be something bright and happy and pure far above the sphere of our sorrow?"

Of course all that is not said, only suggested: but it is obviously the spirit of the poem, and it is this spirit that made me write to Amal the other day that it would be perhaps impossible to find in English literature a more perfect example of psychic inspiration than these eight lines you have translated . . . If I make these criticisms at all it is because you have accustomed me to find in you a power of rendering the spirit and sense of your original while turning it into fine poetry in its new tongue which I would not expect or exact from any other translator . . . A translator is not necessarily bound to the original he chooses; he can make his own poem out of it if he likes, and that is what is generally done. Your translations were exceptional in this respect, for it is not many who can carry over the spirit of a poem, the characteristic power of its language and the turn of its rhythmical movement from one language to another, especially languages so alien in temperament to each other as English and Bengali . . .

What does your friend mean by philosophy in a poem? Of course if one sets out to write a metaphysical argument in verse like the Greek Empedocles or the Roman Lucretius, it is a risky business and is likely to land you into prosaic poetry which is a less pardonable mixture than poetic prose. And also one has to be very careful, when philosophising even in a less perilous way, not to be flat or heavy. It is obviously easier to be poetic when writing about a skylark than when writing about the attributes of the Brahman! But that does not mean that there is to be no thought or no expression of truth in poetry; there is no great poet who has not tried to philosophise. Shelley wrote about the skylark, but he also wrote about the Brahman. "Life like a dome of many-coloured glass Stains the white radiance of eternity" is as good poetry as "Hail to thee blithe spirit." And there are flights of unsurpassable poetry in the Gita and the Upanishads. These rigid dicta are always excessive and there is no reason why a poet should allow the expression of his personality or the spirit within him or his whole poetic mind to be clipped, cabined or stifled by any theories or "thou shalt not"-s of this character.

I may say that purely vital poetry can be very remarkable. Many now-a-days in Europe seem even to think that poetry should be written only from the vital (I mean from poetic sensations, not from ideas) and that that is the only pure *poetry*. The poets of the vital plane seize with a great vividness and extraordinary force of rhythm and phrase the life-power and the very sensation of the things they describe and express them to the poetic sense. What is often lacking in them is a perfect balance between this power and the other powers of poetry: intellectual, psychic, emotional etc. There is something in them which gives an impression of excess—when they are great in genius, splendid excess, but still not the perfect perfection.

SRI AUROBINDO

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Dilip,

First of all, faith does not depend upon experience, it is something that is there before experience. When one starts the Yoga, it is not usually on the strength of experience, but on the strength of faith. And it is so not only in Yoga and the spiritual life, but in ordinary life also. All men of action, discoverers, inventors, creators of knowledge proceed by faith and, until the proof is made or the thing done, they go on in spite of disappointment, failure, disproof, denial,—because of something in them that tells them that this is the truth, the thing that must be followed and done. Sri Ramakrishna even went so far as to say, when asked whether blind faith was not wrong, that blind faith was the only kind to have, for faith is either blind or it is not faith but something else—reasoned experience, proved conviction or ascertained knowledge.

Faith is the soul's witness to something not yet manifested, or not yet realised, but which yet the Knower within us, even in the absence of all indications, feels to be true or supremely worth following or achieving. This thing within us can last even when there is no fixed belief in the mind, even when the vital struggles and revolts and refuses. Who is there that practised the Yoga and had not his periods, long periods, of disappointment and failure and disbelief and darkness—but there is something that sustains him and goes on in spite of himself, because it feels that what it followed after was yet true and it more than feels, it knows. The fundamental faith in Yoga is this, inherent in the soul, that the Divine exists and the Divine is the one thing to be followed after—nothing else in life is worth having in comparison with that.

SRI AUROBINDO

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Dilip,

I have started writing about doubt, but even in doing so I am afflicted by the "doubt" whether any amount of writing or of anything else can ever persuade the eternal doubt in man which is the penalty of his native ignorance. In the first place, to write adequately would mean anything from 60 to 600 pages, but not even 6,000 convincing pages would convince Doubt. For Doubt exists for its own sake; its very function is to doubt always and, even when convinced, to go on doubting still; it is only to persuade its entertainer to give it board and lodging that it pretends to be an honest truth-seeker. This is a lesson I have learnt from the experience both of my own mind and of the minds of others; the only way to get rid of doubt is to take Discrimination as one's detector of truth and falsehood and under its guard to open the door freely and courageously to experience.

All the same I have started writing, but I will begin not with Doubt, but with the demand for the Divine as a concrete certitude, quite as concrete as any physical phenomenon caught by the senses. Now, certainly, the Divine must be such a certitude not only as concrete but more concrete than anything sensed by ear or touch in the world of Matter; but it is a certitude not of mental thought but of essential experience. When the Peace of God descends on you, when the Divine Presence is there within you, when the *Ananda* rushes on you like a sea, when you are driven like a leaf before the wind by the breath of the Divine Force, when Love flowers out from you on all creation, when Divine knowledge floods you with a Light which illumines and transforms in a moment all that was before dark, sorrowful and obscure, when all that is becomes part of the One Reality, when it is all around you felt at once by the spiritual contact, by the inner vision, by the illumined seeing thought, by the vital sensation and even by the very physical sense, when everywhere you see, hear, touch only the Divine, then you can much less doubt it or deny it than you can deny or doubt daylight or air or the sun in heaven—for of all these physical things you cannot be sure but they are what your senses represent them to be; but in the concrete experiences of the Divine, doubt is impossible.

As to permanence, you cannot expect permanence of the initial spiritual experiences from the beginning—only a few have that and even for them the high intensity is not always there; for most the experience comes and then draws back behind the veil waiting for the human part to be prepared and made ready to bear and hold fast its increase and then its permanence. But to doubt it on that account would be irrational in the extreme. One does not doubt the existence of air because a strong wind is not always blowing or of sunlight because night intervenes between dawn and dusk. The difficulty lies in the normal human consciousness to which spiritual experience comes as something abnormal and is in fact supernormal. This weak limited normality finds it difficult at first even to get any touch of that greater and intenser supernormal or it gets it diluted into its own duller stuff of mental or vital experience, and when the spiritual does come in its own overwhelming power very often cannot bear or, if it bears, cannot hold and keep it. Still once a decisive breach has been made in the walls built by the mind against the Infinite, the breach widens sometimes, slowly, sometimes swiftly, until there is no wall any longer, and there is the permanence.

But the decisive experiences cannot be brought, the permanence of a new state of consciousness in which they will be normal cannot be secured if the mind is always interposing its own reservations, prejudgments, ignorant formulas or if it insists on arriving at the Divine certitude as it would at the quite relative truth of a mental conclusion, by reasoning, doubt, enquiry and all the other paraphernalia of Ignorance feeling and fumbling around after knowledge; these greater things can only be brought by the progressive opening of a consciousness quieted and turned steadily towards spiritual experiences. If you ask why the divine has so disposed it on these highly inconvenient bases, it is a futile question,—for this is nothing else than a psychological necessity imposed by the very nature of things. It is so because these experiences of the Divine are not mental constructions, not vital movements, but essential things, not things merely thought but realities, not mentally felt but felt in our very underlying substance and essence. No doubt, the mind is always there and can intervene; it can and does have its own type of mentalizing about the Divine, thoughts, beliefs, emotions, mental reflections of spiritual Truth, even a kind of mental realisation which repeats as well as it can some kind of figure of the higher Truth, and all this is not without value, but it is not concrete, intimate, indubitable. Mind by itself is incapable of ultimate certitude; whatever it believes, it can doubt; whatever it can affirm, it can deny; whatever it gets hold of, it can and does let go. That if you like, is its freedom, noble right—privilege; it may be all you can say in its praise, but by these methods of mind you cannot hope (outside the reach of physical phenomena and hardly even there) to arrive at anything you can call an ultimate certitude. It is for this compelling reason that mentalising or enquiring about the Divine cannot by its own right bring the Divine. If the consciousness is always busy with small mental movements,—specially accompanied, as they usually are, by a host of vital movements, desires, prepossessions and all else that vitiates human thinking —even apart from the native insufficiency of reason— what room can there be for a new order of knowledge, for fundamental experiences or for those deep and tremendous upsurgings or descents of the Spirit? It is indeed possible for the mind in the midst of its activities to be suddenly taken by surprise, overwhelmed, swept aside while all is flooded with a sudden inrush of spiritual experience. But if afterwards it begins questioning, doubting, theorising, surmising what these might be and whether it is true or not, what else can the spiritual Power do but retire and wait for the bubbles of the Mind to cease?

I would ask one simple question of those who would make the intellectual mind the standard and judge of spiritual experience. Is the Divine something less than Mind or is it something greater? Is mental consciousness with its groping enquiry, endless argument, unquenchable doubt, stiff and unplastic logic something superior or even equal to the Divine Consciousness or is it something inferior in its action and status? If it is greater, then there is no reason to seek after the Divine. If it is equal, then spiritual experience is quite superfluous. But if it is inferior, how can it challenge, judge, make the Divine stand as an accused or a witness before its tribunal, summon it to appear as a candidate for admission before a Board of Examiners or pin it like an insect under its examining microscope? Can the vital animal hold up as infallible the standard of its vital instincts, associations and impulses and judge, interpret and fathom by it the mind of man? It cannot, because man's mind is a greater power working in a wider, more complex way which the animal vital consciousness cannot follow. Is it so difficult to see, similarly, that the Divine Consciousness must be something infinitely wider, more complex than the human mind, filled with greater power and lights, moving in a way which mere Mind cannot judge, interpret or fathom by the standard of its fallible reason and limited half-knowledge? The simple fact is there that Spirit and Mind are not the same thing and that it is the spiritual consciousness into which the Yogi has to enter (in all this I am not in the least speaking of the supermind) if he wants to be in permanent contact or union with the Divine. It is not then a freak of the Divine or a tyranny to insist on the mind recognising its limitations, quieting itself, giving up its demands, and opening and surrendering to a greater Light than it can find on its own obscurer level.

This does not mean that Mind has no place at all in the spiritual life; but it means that it cannot be even the main instrument, much less the authority to whose judgment all must submit itself, including the Divine. Mind must learn from the greater consciousness it is approaching and not impose its own standards on it; it has to receive illumination, open to a higher Truth, admit a greater power that doesn't work according to mental canons, surrender itself and allow its half-light half-darkness to be flooded from above till where it was blind it can see, where it was deaf it can hear, where it was insensible it can feel, and where it was baffled, uncertain, questioning, disappointed it can have joy, fulfilment, certitude and peace.

This is the position on which Yoga stands, a position based upon constant experience since men began to seek after the Divine. If it is not true, then there is no truth in Yoga and no necessity for Yoga. If it is true, then it is on that basis, from the standpoint of the necessity of this greater consciousness that we can see whether doubt is of any utility for the spiritual life. To believe anything and everything is certainly not demanded of the spiritual seeker; such a promiscuous and imbecile credulity would be not only unintellectual, but in the last degree unspiritual. At every moment of the spiritual life until one has got fully into the higher light, one has to be on one's guard and to be able to distinguish spiritual truth from pseudo-spiritual imitations of it or substitutes for it set up by the mind and the vital desire. The power to distinguish between truths of the Divine and the lies of the Asura is a cardinal necessity for Yoga. The question is whether that can best be done by the negative and destructive method of doubt, which often kills falsehood but rejects truth too with the same impartial blow, or a more positive, helpful and luminously searching power can be found which is not compelled by its inherent ignorance to meet truth and falsehood alike . . . An indiscriminateness of mental belief is not the teaching of spirituality or of Yoga; the faith of which it speaks is not a crude mental belief but the fidelity of the soul to the guiding light within it, a fidelity which has to remain till the light leads it into knowledge.

SRI AUROBINDO

Guru!

Brotteaux, one of the unabashed scoffers in Anatole France's *Dieux Ont Soif* throws this hearty fling at God in the face of Father Longuemare, the pious Priest.

"Ou Dieu veut empêcher le mal et ne le peut, ou il le peut et ne le veut, ou il ne le peut ni ne le veut, ou il le veut et le peut. S'il le veut et ne le peut, il est impuissant; s'il le peut et ne le veut, il est pervers; s'il ne le peut ni ne le veut, il est impuissant et pervers; s'il le veut et le peut, que ne le fait-il, mon Père?

(Either God would prevent evil if he could, but could not, or he could but would not, or he neither could nor would, or he both would and could. If he would but could not, he is impotent; if he could but would not, he is perverse; if he neither could nor would, he is at once impotent and perverse; if he both could and would why on earth doesn't he do it, Father?)

I send this to you as I immensely enjoyed the joke and am sure you would too, hoping you would have something to fend it off with.

DILIP

* * *

Dilip,

Anatole France is always amusing whether he is ironising about God and Christianity or about the rational animal Humanity (with a big H) and the follies of his reason and his conduct. But I presume you never heard of God's explanation of his non-interference to Anatole France when they met in some Heaven of Irony, I suppose—it can't have been in the heaven of Karl Marx, in spite of France's conversion before his death. God is reported to have strolled up to him and said: "I say, Anatole, you know that was a good joke of yours; but there was a good cause for my non-interference. Reason came along and told me: 'Look here, why do you pretend to exist? You know you don't exist and never existed, or, if you do, you have made such a mess of your creation that we can't tolerate you any longer. Once we have got you out of the way all will be right upon earth, tip-top, A1; my daughter Science and I have arranged that between us. Man will raise his noble brow, the head of creation, dignified, free, equal, fraternal, democratic, depending upon nothing but himself, with nothing greater than himself anywhere in existence. There will be no God, no gods, no priestcraft, no religion, no kings, no oppression, no poverty, no war or discord anywhere. Industry will fill the earth with abundance; Commerce will spread her golden reconciling wings everywhere; Universal Education will stamp out ignorance and leave no room for folly or unreason in any human brain. Man will become cultured, disciplined, rational, scientific, well-informed, arriving always at the right conclusion upon full and sufficient data. The voice of the scientists and the experts will be loud in the land and guide mankind to the earthly paradise. A perfected society; health universalised by a developed medical science and a sound hygiene; everything rationalised; science evolved, infallible, omnipotent, omniscient; the riddle of existence solved; the Parliament of Man, the Federation of the world; evolution, of which man, magnificent man, is the last term, completed in the noble white race, a humanitarian kindness and uplifting for our backward brown, yellow and black brothers; peace, peace, peace, reason, order, unity everywhere.' There was a lot more like that, Anatole, and I was so much impressed by the beauty of the picture and its convenience, for I would have nothing to do or to supervise, that I at once retired from business—for, you know that I was always of a retiring disposition and inclined to keep myself behind the veil or in the background at the best of times. But what is this

I hear? It does not seem to me from reports that Reason even with the help of Science has kept her promise. And if not, why not? Is it because she would not, or because she could not? Or is it because she both would not and could not? Or because she both would and could, but somehow did not? And I say, Anatole, these children of theirs, the State, Industrialism, Capitalism and the rest have a queer look; they seem very much like Titanic monsters armed, too, with all the powers of Intellect and all the weapons and organizations of Science! Yet it does look as if mankind were not freer under them than under Kings and the Churches!! What has happened?—or is it possible that Reason is not supreme and infallible, even that she has made a greater mess of it than I could have done myself!!" Here the report of the conversation ends; I give it for what it is worth, for I am not acquainted with this God and have to take him on trust from Anatole France.

SRI AUROBINDO

* * *

Guru!

You write: "The Shavian assertiveness is not offensive (as the Hugoesque tends to be) because it is full also of a smiling self-mockery, an irony that under a form of deliberate self-praise cuts at itself and the world at one sweep. It is curious that so many people seem to miss this character of Shaw's self-assertiveness and self-praise—its essential humour." But what about Frank Harris's exposure of Shaw?

He writes, for instance, in his posthumous biography of his erstwhile colleague and idol: "fifty years later, the Encyclopaedia will read: 'Bernard Shaw—a marvellous statue by Rodin, otherwise unknown.'" Another fact; the judgment of Wells who, broadcasting the other day on

Shaw's apotheosis of Soviet Russia, said: "he heard Shaw's lectures for his exquisite and astonishing English pronunciation, but who ever heard him for anything else?"

DILIP

* * *

Dilip,

I do not think Harris's attack on Shaw can be taken very seriously any more than can Wells' jest about his pronunciation of English being the sole astonishing thing about him. Wells, Chesterton, Shaw and others joust at each other like the *kabiwalas* (rival street-poets) of old Calcutta, though with more refined weapons, and you cannot take their humorous sparrings as considered appreciations; if you do, you turn exquisite jests into solemn nonsense. Mark that their method in these sparrings, the turn of phrase, the style of their wit is borrowed from Shaw himself with personal modifications; for this kind of humour, light as air and sharp as a razor-blade, epigrammatic, paradoxical, often flavoured with burlesque seriousness and urbane hyperbole, good-humoured and cutting at once, is not English in origin; it was brought in by two Irishmen, Shaw and Wilde. Harris's stroke about the Rodin bust and Wells' sally are entirely in the Shavian turn and manner, they are showing their cleverness by spiking their guru in swordsmanship with his own rapier. Harris's attack on Shaw's literary reputation may have been serious, there was a sombre and violent brutality about him, which makes it possible; but his main motive was to prolong his own notoriety by a clever and vigorous assault on the mammoth of the hour. Shaw himself supplied materials for his critic, knowing well what he would write, and edited this damaging assault on his own fame, a typical Irish act at once of chivalry and whimsical humour. I don't think Harris had much understanding of Shaw, the man, as apart from the writer; the Anglo-Saxon is not usually capable of understanding either Irish character or Irish humour, it is so different from his own. And Shaw is Irish through and through; there is nothing English about him except the language he writes and even that he has changed into the Irish case, flow, edge and clarity—though not bringing into it, as Wilde did, Irish poetry and colour.

Shaw's seriousness and his humour, real seriousness and mock seriousness, run into each other in a baffling inextricable *mélange*, thoroughly Irish in its character for it is the native Irish turn to speak lightly when in deadly earnest and to utter the most extravagant jests with a profound air of seriousness,—and it so puzzled the British public that they could not for a long time make up their mind as to how to take him. At first they took him for a jester dancing with cap and bells, then for a new kind of mocking Hebrew Prophet or Puritan reformer! Needless to say, both judgments were entirely out of focus. The Irishman is, on one side of him, the vital side, a *passioné,* imaginative and romantic, intensely emotional, violently impulsive, easily inspired to poetry or rhetoric, moved by indignation and suffering to a mixture of aggressive militancy, wistful dreaming and sardonic extravagant humour; on the other side, he is keen in intellect, positive, downright, hating all loose foggy sentimentalism and solemn pretence and prone, in order to avoid the appearance of them in himself, to cover himself with a jest at every step; it is at once his mask and his defence. At bottom he has the possibility in him of a modern Curtius leaping into the yawning pit for a cause, an Utopist or a Don Quixote,—according to occasions a fighter for dreams, an idealistic pugilist, a rebel or a reckless but often shrewd and successful adventurer.

Shaw has all that in him, but with it a cool intellectual clearness, also Irish, but not often put to such use, which dominates it all and tones it down, subdues it into measure and balance, gives an even harmonising colour. There is as a result a brilliant tempered edge of flame, lambent, lighting up what it attacks and destroys, and destroying it by the light it throws upon it, not fiercely but trenchantly,—though with a trenchant playfulness—aggressive and corrosive. An ostentation of humour and parade covers up the attack and puts the opponent off his defence. That is why the English mind never understood Shaw and yet allowed itself to be captured by him, and its old established ideas, "moral" positions, impenetrable armour of commercialised Puritanism and self-righteous Victorian assurance to be ravaged and burned out of existence by Shaw and his allies. Anyone who knows Victorian England and sees the difference now cannot but be struck by it, and Shaw's part in it, at least in preparing and making it possible, is undeniable. That is why I call him devastating, not in any ostentatiously catastrophic sense, for there is a quietly trenchant type of devastatingness, because he has helped to lay low all these things with his scythe of sarcastic mockery and lightly, humorously penetrating seriousness—effective, as you call it, but too deadly in its effects to be called merely effective.

That is Shaw as I have seen him and I don't believe there is anything seriously wrong in my estimate. I don't think we can complain of his seriousness about Pacifism, Socialism and the rest of it; it was simply the form in which he put his dream, the dream he needed to fight for, needed by his Irish nature. Shaw's bugbear was unreason and disorder, his dream was a humanity delivered from vital illusions and deceptions, organising the life-force in obedience to reason, casting out waste and folly as much as possible. It is not likely to happen in the way he hoped, reason has its own illusions, and though he strove against imprisonment in his own rationalistic ideals, trying to escape from them by the issue of his mocking critical humour, he could not help being their prisoner. As for his pose of self-praise, no doubt he valued himself,—the public fighter like the man of action needs to do so in order to act or to fight. Most, though not all, try to veil it under an affection of modesty; Shaw, on the contrary, took the course of raising it to a humorous pitch of burlesque and extravagance. It was at once part of his strategy in commanding attention and a means of mocking at himself—I was not speaking of analytical self-mockery, but of the whimsical Irish kind—so as to keep himself straight and at the same time mocking his audience. It is a peculiarly Irish kind of humour to say extravagant things with a calm convinced tone as if announcing a perfectly serious proposition—the Irish exaggeration of the humour called by the French *pince-sans rire,* his hyperboles of self-praise actually reek with this humorous savour. If his extravagant comparison of himself with Shakespeare had to be taken in dull earnest with no smile in it, he would be either a witless ass or a giant of humourless arrogance,—and Bernard Shaw could be neither.

As to his position in literature, I have given my opinion; but, more precisely, I imagine he will take some place but not a very large place, once the drums have ceased beating and the fighting is over. He has given too much to the battles of the hour perhaps to claim a large share of the future. I suppose some of his plays will survive for their wit and humour and cleverness more than for any higher dramatic quality, like those of three other Irishmen: Goldsmith, Sheridan, Wilde. His prefaces may be saved by their style and force, but it is not sure. At any rate, as a personality he is not likely to be forgotten, even if his writings fade. To compare him with France is futile—they were minds too different and moving in too different domains for comparison to be possible.

SRI AUROBINDO

* * *

Dilip,

I find in Shavianism a delightful note and am thankful to Shaw for being so different from other men that to read even an ordinary interview with him in a newspaper is an intellectual pleasure. As for his being one of the most original personalities of the age, there can be no doubt about that. All that I deny to him is a constructive and creative mind—but his critical force in certain fields at least, as a critic of men and life, was very great, and in that field he can in a sense be called creative—in the sense that he created a singularly effective and living form for his criticism of life. It is not drama, but it is something original and strong and altogether of its own kind—so, up to that limit, I qualify my statement that Shaw was not a creator.

The tide is turning against him after being strongly for him under compulsion from his own power and will, but nothing can alter the fact that he was one of the keenest and most powerful minds of the age with an originality in his way of looking at things which no one else can equal. He is too penetrating and sincere a mind to be a stiff partisan or tied to some intellectual dogma or other. When he sees something which qualifies the "ism" —even that on whose side he is standing, he says so, that need not weaken the ideal behind, on the contrary it is likely to make it more plastic and practicable.

SRI AUROBINDO

Dilip,

First about human love in Sadhana. The soul's turning through love to the Divine must be through a love that is essentially divine, but as the instrument of expression at first is a human nature, it takes the form of human love and *bhakti*. It is only as the consciousness deepens, heightens and changes that the greater eternal love can grow in it and openly transform the human into the divine . . .

You describe the rich human egoistic life you might have lived and you say: "Not altogether a wretched life, you will admit." On paper it sounds even very glowing and satisfactory, as you describe it. But there is no real or final satisfaction in it, except for those who are too common or trivial to seek anything else, and even they are not really satisfied or happy,—and in the end it tires and palls. Sorrow and illness, clash and strife, disappointment, disillusionment and all kinds of human suffering come and beat its glow to pieces—and then decay and death. That is the vital egoistic life as man has found throughout the ages, and yet it is that which this part of your vital regrets? How do you fail to see, when you lay so much stress on the desirability of a merely human consciousness, that suffering is its badge? When the vital resists the change from the human into the divine consciousness, what it is defending is its right to sorrow and suffering and all the rest of it, varied and relieved no doubt by some vital or mental pleasure and satisfactions, but very partially relieved by them and only for a time. In your own case, it was already beginning to pall on you and that was why you turned from it. No doubt, there were the joys of the intellect and of artistic creation, but a man cannot be an artist alone; there is the outer quite human lower vital part* and, in all but a few, it is the most clamorous and insistent part. But what was dissatisfied in you? It was the soul within, first of all, and through it the higher mind and the higher vital.

The "human" vital consciousness has moved always between these two poles: the ordinary life which cannot satisfy and recoil from it to the ascetic solution. India has gone fully through that see-saw: Europe is beginning once more after a full trial to feel the failure of the mere vital egoistic life . . .

Whatever the motive immediately pushing the mind or the vital, if there is a true seeking for the Divine in the being, it must lead eventually to the realisation of the Divine. The soul within has always the inherent *(ahaituki)* yearning for the Divine; the *hetu* or special motive is simply an impulsion used by it to get the mind and the vital to follow the inner urge. If the mind and the vital can feel and accept the soul's sheer love for the Divine for His own sake, then the sadhana gets its full power and many difficulties disappear; but even if they do not, they will get what they seek after in the Divine and through it they will come to realise, even to pass beyond the limit of the original desire . . . I may say that the idea of a joyless God is an absurdity, which only the ignorance of the mind could engender! the Radha love is not based upon any such thing, but means simply that whatever comes on the way to the Divine, pain or joy, *milan* or *viraha* and however long the sufferings may last, the Radha love is unshaken and keeps its faith and certitude pointing fixedly like a star to the supreme object of Love.

What is this *Ananda*, after all? The mind can see in it nothing but a pleasant psychological condition,—but if it were only that, it could not be the rapture which the bhaktas and the mystics find in it. When the Ananda comes into you, it is the Divine who comes into you, just as when the Peace flows into you, it is the Divine who is invading you, or when you are flooded with Light, it is the flood of the Divine Himself that is around you. Of course the Divine is something much more, many other things besides, and in them all a Presence, a Being, a Divine Person, for the Divine is Krishna, is Shiva, is the Supreme Mother. But through the Ananda you can perceive the *Anandamaya* Krishna, for the Ananda is the subtle body and being of Krishna; through the Peace you can perceive the *Shantimaya* Shiva; in the Light in the delivering knowledge, the Love, the fulfilling and uplifting Power you can meet the presence of the Divine Mother. It is this perception that makes the experiences of the bhaktas and mystics so rapturous and enables them to pass more easily through the nights of anguish and separation; when there is this soul-perception, it gives to even a little or brief Ananda a force or value it could not otherwise have, and the Ananda itself gathers by it a growing power to stay, to return, to increase.

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* Sri Aurobindo calls 'lower vital' impulses those that are born of desires and cravings and passions and egoisms and 'higher vital' those that lead to creative activities, generosity, bravery, heroism, etc.

I cannot very well answer the strictures of Russell. For the conception of the Divine as an external omnipotent Power who has "created" the world and governs it, like an absolute and arbitrary monarch, the Christian or Semitic conception, has never been mine; it contradicts too much my seeing and experience during thirty years of *sadhana*. It is against this conception that the atheistic objection is aimed,—for atheism in Europe has been a shallow and rather childish reaction against a shallow and childish exoteric religionism and its popular inadequate and crudely dogmatic notions. But when I speak of the Divine Will I mean something different,—something that has descended here into an evolutionary world of Ignorance, standing at the back of things, pressing on the Darkness with its Light, leading things presently towards the best possible in the conditions of a world of Ignorance and leading it eventually towards a descent of a greater power of the Divine, which will not be an omnipotence held back and conditioned by the law of the world as it is, but in full action and therefore bringing the reign of light, peace, harmony, joy, love, beauty and Ananda, but it manifests as one grows out of the Law of Ignorance into the Law of Light, and it is meant, not as an arbitrary caprice, however, miraculous often its intervention, but as a help in the growth and a Light that leads and eventually delivers. If we take the facts of the world as they are and the facts of spiritual experience as a whole, neither of which can be denied or neglected, then I do not see what other Divine there can be. This Divine may lead us often through darkness, because the darkness is there in us and around us, but it is to the Light He is leading and not to anything else.

SRI AUROBINDO

* * *

Guru!

Krishnaprem, whose letters follow, is a very dear friend of mine. A short account: he comes from a distinguished English family. His original name was Ronald Nixon. He took his Tripos in Cambridge in Mental and Moral Science. A brilliant and deep student of philosophy, it was with him a case of love at first sight with Vedanta, which made him adopt India as his spiritual home. He came first as a Professor of English at the Lucknow University but gave up this much-coveted post with a fat salary for a Professorship at the Hindu University with a far less remuneration because the holy Benares attracted him deeply. Later he gave up that post too, gave away all his savings and belongings—to the last farthing—to resort to

Almora, a poor Vaishnava. He is now at a small Ashram there under the guruship of Sri Mataji who also was very rich and gave up her family and palace and everything for worship of Sri Krishna in the Himalayas. There Ronald changed his name into Krishnaprem . . .

DILIP

* * *

22-1-27.
LUCKNOW.

My dear Dilip,

So you are off to Europe once again? Well, I wish you all luck . . . I do not, I confess, feel altogether clear about the nature of the *adesh* (Divine Command) spoken of by Sri Ramakrishna. I am not at all sure that the greatest work is not done unconsciously and for no other reason than that the doer intensely wants to do it. Of course this intense desire may be said to be the *adesh*, but then doesn't the discussion become somewhat pointless? Many poets have, no doubt, felt some sort of injunction laid on them, for example,—Shelley, Blake, Wordsworth and others, but there are many of whom one doubts it, for example,—Shakespeare, Scott, Byron, Chaucer. In one sense I think the doctrine is a dangerous one (whatever sphere it be applied in) as it leads to the intensification of egoism and the idea—"I'm going to do something." After all, do we not find "the man with a mission" one of the most tiresome types of humanity, and is not our instinct probably right in the matter? Of course it might be replied that the "man with a mission" to whom I refer means a man with a pseudo-mission—*mithya adesh*—but this is a difficult point . . . Then of course there is a further question: Were not Sri Ramakrishna's remarks made in reference to a man seeking to "help others" or influence others to serve others or some such phrase? Does the great artist concern himself with "others" at all? Does he not create because he must, in order to relieve himself of what he has in him? . . . I agree with you: now-a-days we tend to overestimate the power of art, and take the view that art is sadhana or spiritual initiation. But is it? Of course great art can, to a certain extent, take one out of oneself and render one (though perhaps only in a mild and metaphorical manner) independent of space, time and circumstance. However, so can many other enjoyments if pursued ardently enough. Doubtless all activities can become part of a sadhana, if suitably engaged in. But when all is said, the fact remains that there is a difference between Yoga as a sadhana and Art as a sadhana. Artists, you will say, or at least some artists, urge that art can be used as a sadhana. But to this platitude the only reply is a counter-platitude: that anything could be taken as *sadhana* (e.g. battle of Kurukshetra). To this the art-enthusiasts will reply in an injured tone that art enriches our spiritual life. I wonder. I fancy it would not be difficult to maintain that art is a substitute—a surrogate for spiritual life; in Bacon's words, "the shows of things are submitted to the desires of the mind." Shelley has defined poetry as "the record of the best and happiest moments of the best and happiest minds." This is not a bad definition, much better than many more pretentious ones. But can one seriously maintain that the keeping of such a record amounts to a sadhana? Isn't it as vague as some idealists' pale internationalism? I used once to believe in such vague consolations, but I am now beginning to have my doubts whether all this is as satisfactory as is claimed. For myself, though I can be tolerant to all countries, I have only one, and that, strange to say, is not England but India. What I feel is, that the wealth of tradition which is a nation *is* too precious a thing to be merged into a common hotch-potch the same from London to Yokohama.

If we confine ourselves to Europe (at least Western Europe) the case is somewhat different as the traditions are more or less common; but can England and India, say, be mixed so philanthropically without doing vital injury to both? When the traditions of a nation die, then that nation is dead, and even if it persists as a great Power in the world, yet it is nothing but an aggregate of meaningless individuals determinedly pursuing their contemptible aims. History is a symbol, and what that symbol signifies is something infinitely more precious than a mere peddling adherence to a sequence of so-called "facts." There is only one root fact anywhere, and that is the Eternal One. Whatever helps to reveal Him, is a fact, and whatever helps to hide Him is a lie even if all the fools in the world affirm it.

Yours affectionately,
RONALD
(later KRISHNAPREM)

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8-11-29.
Almora.

My dear Dilip,

K—writes to me of the "quest of the ever-new . . . through the unfoldings of the mind," which seems to me too vague a sentiment (as that of art being a sadhana) to be of any real use. Moreover, what I seek is not the "ever-new" but that which is "the same yesterday, today and tomorrow, the eternal Sri Krishna, changeless in change and yet changing in changelessness."

I fully agree with you, Dilip: I cannot agree with those who affect to see Yogas in Science and Art (or social work). Disciplines they may be, but the intellectual ardours of the one and the emotional transports of the other are, as such, little nearer to Yoga than the heroic labours of the coal-miner or the ephemeral loves of the philanderer. Of course they may be pursued by real yogis, but generally they are not, and they can only become real yogic sadhanas when pursued as such, which in practice presents enormous difficulty. Anyhow, sadhana or not, they are all part of the *Lila,* and those who are cast for those parts must speak the lines they are given by the Producer and I certainly do not wish to depreciate those, or indeed, any portions of the Divine performance. After all, as the Gita says, *"Sadrisham chestate swasyah prakriterjnanavanapi."*—"Even the man of knowledge behaves in conformity with his own nature." It isn't what a man does that constitutes Yoga but what he realises about what he is doing, or, truer still, what he realises about what is being done through him.

I don't know why I have written all this to you, to whom it is now no doubt quite a matter to be taken for granted. I suppose it is just the pleasure of thinking aloud to one who, as you say, is of the same race and family.

Affectionately,
KRISHNAPREM

* * *

3-12-29.
Almora.

My dear Dilip,

As regards my remarks about science and art in my last letter, your interpretation was quite right. All I meant was that all these things, were in themselves, in a totally different plane from Yoga. Seen from the top of a mountain the difference between a dog and an elephant is negligible. Yoga is just such a mountain and as it is said somewhere in the Gita: "Even the seeker after Yoga transcends the Vedas." He certainly transcends science and art and all the rest of it. However, as I told you so often, I do not at all disparage either of those pursuits, nor indeed, any part of the Divine Lila.

You say, you hope for a rapprochement between Science and Yoga. But I am afraid I cannot believe that the day is dawning when scientists will become yogis. It would take long to explain it just now, but I am inclined to feel that the subjectivism of some modern psychology, in the near future will tend to weave a curtain which will cut off educated men from perception of Reality even more effectually than was done by the old-style materialism. Even yogic experiences will be explained, so clearly, and apparently convincingly, that few will be able to hold out. However, I may be wrong and in any case the time has not yet come . . .

I do so entirely agree with Sri Aurobindo's remarks about the difference between Indian and Western philosophy in his letter to Chadwick where he so beautifully and luminously explains the difference between the Western outlook on life and the Indian, e.g., where he writes:

"All European metaphysical thought—even in those thinkers who try to prove or explain the existence and nature of God or of the Absolute—does not in its method and result go beyond the intellect. But the intellect is incapable of knowing the supreme Truth: it can only range about seeking for Truth, and catching fragmentary representations of it, not the things itself, and trying to piece them together. Mind cannot arrive at Truth; it can only make some constructed figure that tries to represent it or a combination of figures. At the end of European thought, therefore, there must always be Agnosticism, declared or implicit. Intellect, if it goes sincerely to its own end, has to return and give this report: 'I cannot know; there is or at least it seems to me that there may be or even must be Something beyond, some ultimate Reality, but about its truth I can only speculate; it is either unknowable or cannot be known by me.' Or, if it has received some light on the way from what is beyond it, it can say too: 'There is perhaps a consciousness beyond Mind, for I seem to catch glimpses of it and even to get intimations from it. If that is in touch with the Beyond or if it is itself the consciousness of the Beyond and you can find some way to reach it, then this Something can be known but not otherwise.

"Any seeking of the supreme Truth through intellect alone must end either in Agnosticism of this kind or else in some intellectual system or mind-constructed formula. There have been hundreds of these systems and formulas and there can be hundreds more, but none can be definitive. Each may have its value for the mind, and different systems with their contrary conclusions can have an equal appeal to intelligences of equal power and competence. All this labour of speculation has its utility in training the human mind and helping to keep before it the idea of Something beyond and Ultimate towards which it must turn. But the intellectual Reason can only point vaguely or feel gropingly towards it or try to indicate partial and even conflicting aspects of its manifestation here; it cannot enter into and know it. As long as we remain in the domain of the intellect only, an impartial pondering over all that has been thought and sought after, a constant throwing-up of ideas, of all the possible ideas, and the formation of this or that philosophical belief, opinion or conclusion is all that can be done. This kind of disinterested search after Truth would be the only possible attitude for any wide and plastic intelligence. But any conclusion so arrived at would be only speculative; it could have no spiritual value; it would not give the decisive experience or the spiritual certitude for which the soul is seeking. If the intellect is our highest possible instrument and there is no other means of arriving at supra-physical Truth, then a wise and large Agnosticism must be our ultimate attitude. Things in the manifestation may be known to some degree, but the Supreme and all that is beyond the Mind must remain for ever unknowable.

"It is only if there is a greater consciousness beyond Mind and that consciousness is accessible to us that we can know and enter into the ultimate Reality. Intellectual speculation, logical reasoning as to whether there is or is not such a greater consciousness cannot carry us very far. What we need is a way to get the experience of it, to reach it, enter into it, live in it. If we can get that, intellectual speculation and reasoning must fall necessarily into a very secondary place and even lose their reason for existence. Philosophy, intellectual expression of the Truth may remain, but mainly as a means of expressing this greater discovery and as much of its contents as can at all be expressed in mental terms to those who still live in the mental intelligence.

"This, you will see, answers your point about the Western thinkers, Bradley and others, who have arrived through intellectual thinking at the idea of an 'Other beyond Thought' or have even, like Bradley, tried to express their conclusions about it in terms that recall some of the expressions in the Arya.The idea in itself is not new; it is as old as the Vedas. It was repeated in other forms in Buddhism, Christian Agnosticism, Sufism. Originally, it was not discovered by intellectual speculation, but by the mystics following an inner spiritual discipline. When, somewhere between the seventh and fifth centuries B. C., men began both in the East and West to intellectualise knowledge, this Truth survived in the East; in the West, where the intellect began to be accepted as the sole or highest instrument for the discovery of Truth, it began to fade. But still it has there too tried constantly to return; the Neo-Platonists brought it back, and now, it appears, the New-Hegelians and others (e.g., the Russian Ouspensky and one or two German thinkers, I believe) seem to be reaching after it. But still there is a difference.

"In the East, especially in India, the metaphysical thinkers have tried as in the West, to determine the nature of the highest Truth by the intellect. But, in the first place, they have not given mental thinking the supreme rank as an instrument for the discovery of Truth, but only a secondary status. The first rank has always been given to spiritual intuition and illumination and spiritual experience; an intellectual conclusion that contradicts this supreme authority is held invalid. Secondly, each philosophy has armed itself with a practical way of reaching to the supreme state of consciousness, so that even when one begins with Thought the aim is to arrive at a consciousness beyond mental thinking. Each philosophical founder (as also those who continued his work or school) has been a metaphysical thinker doubled with a Yogi. Those who were only philosophic intellectuals were respected for their learning but never took rank as truth-discoverers. And the philosophies that lacked a sufficiently powerful means of spiritual experience died out and became things of the past because they were not dynamic for spiritual discovery and realization.

"In the West it was just the opposite that came to pass. Thought, intellect, the logical reason came to be regarded more and more as the highest end; in philosophy Thought is the be-all and the end-all. It is by intellectual thinking and speculation that the truth is to be discovered: even spiritual experience has been summoned to pass the tests of the intellect, if it is to be held valid—just the reverse of the Indian position. Even those who see that mental Thought must be overpassed and admit a supramental 'Other,' do not seem to escape from the feeling that it must be through mental Thought, sublimating and transmuting itself, that this other Truth must be reached and made to take the place of the mental limitation and ignorance. And again Western thought has ceased to be dynamic, it has sought after a theory of things, not after realisation. It was still dynamic amongst the ancient Greeks, but for moral and aesthetic rather than spiritual ends. Later on, it became yet more purely intellectual and academic; it became intellectual speculation only, without any practical ways and means for the attainment of the Truth by spiritual experiment, spiritual discovery, a spiritual transformation. If there were not this difference, there would be no reason for seekers like yourself to turn to the East for guidance; for in the purely intellectual field the western thinkers are as competent as any Eastern sage. It is the spiritual way, the road that leads beyond the intellectual levels, the passage from the outer being to the inmost Self which has been lost by the over-intellectuality of the mind of Europe.

"In the extracts you have sent me from Bradley and Joachim, it is still the intellect thinking about what is beyond itself and coming to an intellectual, a reasoned speculative conclusion about it. It is not dynamic for the change which it attempts to describe. If these writers were expressing in mental terms some realization, even mental, some intuitive experience of this 'Other than Thought,' then one ready for it might feel it through the veil of the language they use and himself draw near to the same experience. Or if, having reached the intellectual conclusion, they had passed on to the spiritual realization, finding the way or following one already found, then in pursuing their thought one might be preparing oneself for the same transition. But there is nothing of the kind in all this strenuous thinking. It remains in the domain of the intellect and in that domain it is no doubt admirable; but it does not become dynamic for spiritual experience. I propose to deal with the substance of this thought and its limitations hereafter, but for the present, I leave it there.

"It is not by 'thinking out' the entire reality, but by a change of consciousness that one can pass from the ignorance to the knowledge—the knowledge by which we become what we know. To pass from the external to a direct and intimate inner consciousness; to widen consciousness out of the limits of the ego and the body; to heighten it by an inner will and aspiration and opening to the Light till it passes in its ascent beyond Mind, to bring down a descent of the supramental Divine through self-giving and surrender with a consequent transformation of mind, life and body—this is the *integral* way to the Truth. (I have said that the idea of the Supermind was already in existence from ancient times. There was in India and elsewhere the attempt to reach it by rising to it; but what was missed was the way to make it integral for the life and to bring it down for transformation of the whole nature, even of the physical nature). It is this that we call the Truth here and aim at in our Yoga.

"I shall answer in a continuation of this letter your question about the Arya and then write what else I have to say in the matter."

Quite, Dilip. And all his remarks about the Western philosophers are as true. Even where they are talking about the same sort of things they do so from utterly different points of view and have nothing real in common under the seeming agreement. Whether a Western philosopher says with McTeggart that a stone is a colony of souls, or with Berkley that it is an idea in the mind of God or with Bertrand Russell that it is a collection of perspectives of neutral stuff (whatever that may mean), in practice he means nothing practical at all and is in just the same position as the common-sense person who says that a stone is just a stone. All these Western systems are like that. They are excellent as intellectual training, but they never come to business. (I have often noticed that many European scholars will discourse eloquently about the beauty and healthiness and convenience of Indian dress, say, or Indian ways, but let any European take them at their word and go and put on a *dhoti* and he is damned at once. It is so with Western thought. It will talk eloquently but will never "put on the dhoti," and will regard you as vulgar if you attempt to do so).

That is why I differ from those wonderfully catholic men who seek to build a bridge between India and Megalopolis and want to make it easy for the 'Megalopolitan' (to use Spengler's words) to stroll over to India and back for the evening walk in Piccadilly. I would rather the Megalopolitan were confronted once and for all with the necessity of a choice so that if he chose India he should have to renounce his cultural pride for good and all and bow his head in the dust that Sri Krishna trod. For that reason I do not care for Woodroff's attempts to show how much in accord with modern science are certain aspects of Shakta philosophy. I would prefer simply to say: "This is the truth; take it or leave it." If science says this in her own way, so much the better for science. If not, so much the worse . . .

You talk of internationalists. But all this pale internationalism will not get one anywhere, and it will be swept away again by the very next flood of violent national passions. Noble as it is, it seems anaemic when confronted with say the vivid though Asuric life of the socialist Third International. However, my chief objection to an artist internationalist is that I suspect him of using the words and expressions coined by *yogis* and *rishis* in their efforts to set forth their experiences . . . of using, I say, these expressions to lend a sort of borrowed grandeur to the pale experiences of 'art' which (when even genuine) are to the former as the moon is to the sun. He is thus helping to debase the currency as it were.

Give Chadwick my love and some news about your own sweet self.

Affectionately,
KRISHNAPREM

* * *

My dear Dilip,

I was so delighted to get a real letter from you, and not a mere line or two, that I am sitting down to answer it at once. However, as I am still somewhat in the grip of a heavy cold, I trust that you will put down any incoherencies of thought that may occur to the consequent muddiness of brain which is apt to ensue.

You ask if I have doubts. Well, not now to any serious extent unless I count as 'doubts' occasional periods of depression in which things seem for the moment—not so much dubious, as 'flat.' There was a period which followed my first period of intense faith, a period in which I began to be troubled with doubts but I came to see that the root cause of my doubts was simply that things weren't going as I wished them to go. When I ceased to expect that things should go as I wished, the doubts vanished. I don't mean by the above that I consider that I have attained the stage of ceasing to want things to go my way. All I mean is that I have ceased to make it a prerequisite of faith that these should do so. Since then I am not worried in any serious manner. I believe that the desire to have one's own way is the root cause of all doubt. My own position is something like this: It is well-known that there are three main sources of proof—*Pratyaksha, Anumān* and *Shabda* (or *Āptavachan*). Now, common opinion starts by assuming that Pratyaksha is the most valid—"seeing is believing"—as they say, then *Anumān* and lastly authority or *Āptavachan*. This view leads almost inevitably (if courageously followed) to Russellism. On the contrary the great seers of the past, of all schools of thought, have taken quite the contrary view. They agreed that inasmuch as our senses are notoriously liable to error, and supernormal experiences notoriously liable to misinterpretation, *Pratyaksha praman*—direct evidence—is defective. Inference (*Anuman*) being dependent on Pratyaksha, it is liable to the same defects and the best basis for belief is Āptavachan whether in the form of Guruvakya,—Guru's directions—or of Shastra—the revealed scriptures; the two are fundamentally the same thing. They then reversed the ordinary order and by so doing arrived not at Russellism but at spiritual experience and Divine realisation. Hence I hold that one must at all costs start from the right and if one is to get the right result. One must give up the stupid belief that the world is what it seems to be. It isn't, and the sooner we realise that the better for us. Incidentally, why do you keep harping on Russell? I quite agree that he is a fine man in many ways and a fine thinker of his own sort but why do you keep hoping that your Gurudev or someone else will answer his sceptical arguments? *If you accept Russell's premisses you will be forced into his conclusions* but then why accept his premisses? He is no muddle-headed thinker whose conclusions are at fault with his premisses. Quite the reverse. If you set foot on an escalator you will automatically be carried to the top of it, so why set foot on it when you see it is going in the wrong direction?

How do we know that the Shastra is true? How do we know that the Grand Trunk Road leads to Delhi? Because thousands and thousands have passed along it and reached the goal described. Has anyone yet been known to reach God through Russellism? 'Pratyaksha' tells me that the *shālagram* is an ammonite fossil or some such thing. Shastra and Guru tell me that it is Swayam Sri Krishna. Which is right? "By their fruits shall ye know them." No one has yet reached God by reliance on sense-testimony alone.

The next point you raise is about the concreteness of Sri Krishna. You use the term *'sarupya'* equality of status through similarity of form, as equivalent to *'milan,'* union with the Divine. This is not quite clear to me. In Vaishnava terminology *'sarupya'* means merely having a similar form to that of Sri Krishna and is not used for Radha Bhava. However, that is a mere matter of names. I am myself utterly certain that Sri Krishna can be experienced in perfect concreteness. As I think I once said before: He is the concrete of concretes and no mere misty abstraction or imagined form. He is no semi-imaginary projection out of a formless Impersonal Brahman, but is the reality of realities which supports all else. I am not denying the reality of experience of the Nirvishesh Brahman but saying that the latter is like seeing the sunlight while to see Krishna is to see the sun itself.

I quite agree with you that love of Sri Krishna is far more satisfying than any mere impersonal Ananda and one who has once reached the level even of desiring such love can never be satisfied with less. But on the other hand I do also feel that one must make no demands on Him that He should show Himself to receive our love. There is *no doubt whatever* that He both can and does do so and that too in as concrete a form as anyone could desire but I feel that one must leave that entirely to Him and—if it is His will—be content to love Him without any return or even any Darshan. Till then our love is tainted with selfishness. Gopiprem is not the desire to enjoy Krishna but the desire to serve and be enjoyed by Him. One must make no demands and no bargain. But at the same time that does not mean, as some adhyatmikisers teach, that love of Krishna is thus merely a *means* to establish in an easy manner the state of unselfishness and that when that is attained there is no further any more need of the personal Krishna at all. It is quite the other way round. Unselfishness is the means to attain Him and at His own time He does accept the love of His bhakta in as personal and real a form as can be desired and a great deal more real than we can conceive. He is more real, more vivid than 'sunlight on the retina' as you put it. We have got so used to consider spiritual realities as vague and unsubstantial that we quite fail to realise that whatever 'reality' and 'vividness' is to be found in our sense perceptions is but a faint shadow of His vividness. Krishna's embraces are no mere damned allegory about purusha and prakriti. For God's sake, Dilip, remember that Krishna's feet are more real than yours.

Also you write that you have sometimes 'gone for Sri Aurobindo.' You must not. *Of course* he will not mind. He sees jewel in the lotus and can smile at your criticism but *you* mustn't do it. Even in thought you mustn't criticise him. It all springs from desire to have things one's own way. He is your Guru and in the first place, it is sheer ingratitude to criticise one who has shown you the light and in the second, Guru is inseparable from Krishna. He is the one who has shown you the light and your whole life can be no repayment for such a gift. Even if you were to spend the rest of this life with no further 'experience' at all, you would be utterly wrong if you refused to give yourself to him. As far as I know he does not ask for blind obedience from his disciples (at least so I gather from your letter) but one must never criticise even when one can't follow. If one could understand everything one's Guru said then there would be hardly any need for a Guru at all.

You say you wonder why doubts persist even in the face of experience. Well, I think one reason is because we do not see the full causal system of spiritual experiences. Our ordinary life is a linked series of causes and effects and the persistence of the visible effects assures us of the reality of their causes. Thus the reality of the interview I had with a carpenter yesterday or last month is testified to by the reality of the piece of work he brought me today. But in spiritual experience the ordinary aspirant is not aware of the whole cause-effect series and therefore these experiences seem to come without any 'before and after.' In fact they come in from another dimension and as such we tend to doubt them afterwards. But this also happens with sense-experience when the causal series is not perceived. A friend of mine once saw a ship sink suddenly in mid-ocean as a result of a torpedo from an unseen submarine and assured me that when it had sunk and left no trace whatever he found it almost impossible to believe that there had even been a ship there at all.

Why do you doubt that Krishna will respond to you? Probably you feel that you are unworthy. So are we all. We are no Rukminis that we can write to Krishna saying as she did that "I have such and such good qualities and only you are worthy of them." We have nothing to recommend us to Krishna except our desire for Him. That is why the Brajavasis must be our Gurus and not Rukmini, and the queens of Dwarka. He Himself is full of all good qualities and powers. Will you try to dazzle a jeweller with a handful of imitation diamonds or astonish a Yogi with a few conjuring tricks? All we can offer Him is our love and that He will never reject. Would to God we had more of it.

You mustn't think of me as an 'advanced Yogi' as you put it. Whatever little thing in me has caught your attention is not mine at all. It is simply the seed planted in me by my Guru and which, like so many others, I do nothing but try to smother with my own self-will. If only we would give ourselves thoroughly that jewel would shine in our hearts with such a radiance that the ignorant many would take us for 'avatars' and we all the time nothing but the receptacles of the Divine Grace given by the Guru. Instead of which, we smother it up in order to satisfy trivial desires and petty sins.

You ask me about myself. You will have gathered from this letter all that is important, namely what I am feeling —and the rest is of no account. I went to Brindaban and some other places a month or two ago and was made to give various lectures but none of that is of any great interest.

The above represents what I am feeling. I don't know of course whether it corresponds at all points with your own Guru's teaching. If it doesn't then just disregard it. I am glad to hear that your Among The Great is almost ready and eagerly look forward to reading it. Thank you for sending the interesting letters from Sri Aurobindo. I particularly liked the very important distinction made between the underlying faith which, even in people like us, is immovable and the superficial faith which waivers from time to time in the winds of desires and even of a disordered liver.

One thing I suspect, Dilip, both from your letter and from Sri Aurobindo's letters and that is that you sometimes indulge in "harmless" phantasies about worldly life and what you might have done in it. Don't think that I am being 'superior' as I am merely speaking from my own experience when I say that much 'phantasying' is not only far from harmless to us, but, on the contrary, besides wasting our inner forces in futile dreams that we don't even seriously think of really indulging, besides this I say, it is one of the causes that set in operation superficial doubts which, even though recognised as superficial, are yet quite sufficient to destroy one's inner poise for the time being.

I think that it is most important that we should always remember the distinction between our outer personalities and our inner selves, those selves which Krishna describes as 'Eternal portions of Himself' and which Vaishnava doctrine refers to as Krishna's Nitya Das. By that inner self one must dominate the outer one or, if not always strong enough to do that, one must at least *detach* oneself from the outer, float on the outer self as the lotus floats on the water, surrounded by it but quite untouched. Faith in Krishna and love for Him is really the property of this inner self. The ordinary mental or emotional attitudes that we call belief (or doubt) are merely shadows of this inner faith (or lack of it) cast on the outer mind and emotions. That is why they are fleeting while the inner faith is unwavering. When one acts from that inner self one is utterly free whatever one may be doing but when one acts from the outer so-called self one is bound even when one thinks one is freely indulging one's 'own' desires. In reality one is simply mechanically following the play of the three gunas in one's own (lower) nature. Nevertheless I am not urging that what is sometimes called 'self-realisation' is the goal. It can be had quite certainly and is equally certainly a state of *ananda*, bliss, but it is not the full *ananda*. For that the self which is *anandakanā* (spark of bliss) must enter into relation with Krishna who is *anandaghana*. That is why the final word of the Gita is not *Atma-gnana* (self-knowledge) but *Manmanā bhava madbhaktah* (be my devotee) and that is why the Bhagwat describes faith in Atma-gnana as sattwic but faith in "Krishna-seva" as 'Nistraigunya' (beyond the three gunas).

I think I can sum up my 'creed' (would it were my practice, but action always lags behind vision) in our words. "Seek nothing; give everything." At one time I passionately desired 'experiences' and if one really desires them Krishna will give them, for he is no niggard, but now I feel that love of Him must be independent of all 'experiences' which will come and go at His will and to serve His purpose. It must be something like the air we breathe which may, no doubt, sometimes be perfumed with scent of flowers but is no less essential to us when it has no perceptible scent.

Some people describe Him as formless or as having thousands of hands and feet but two feet are enough for me. And what feet! If one misses them no Brambananda (God-bliss) and no Mukti can be enough to compensate for the loss. I suppose some people would call this anthopomorphism but what does it matter what they call it? Facts are facts and I reject this modern notion that the abstract alone is true. Just as there could be no *ananda*, bliss, anywhere if Krishna were not *anandamaya*, blissful, so there could be no concreteness anywhere if He were not concrete and no form anywhere if He had no form.

Well I must end now. You asked me to write about myself and I have written all that is in my mind: you asked for it!

Love always, Dilip, from
Yours affectionately
Sri Krishnaprem.

Dilip,

Krishnaprem's last letter (dated 3.12.42) is sound throughout as usual; he has, very evidently, a living spiritual consciousness and spiritual knowledge.

Sri Aurobindo

December, 1942

:: XX Almora XX ::
21.7.40

My dear Dilip,

It was a great pleasure to have your long letter and poems after quite an age. How long it seems since we met at Allahabad in 1938. For my part I have not been out of this Ashram, not even as far as Almora town since then, but I have sometimes enjoyed your presence via gramophone.

You ask what I think of the present state of the world. If I say it is an illusion, you will probably misunderstand me as is nearly always the case when that word is used. You will think I mean 'nothing at all' which is certainly not my meaning. If I say that it is part of the Divine Lila, then the feeling that "it must be all right" will surely arise and, except in a somewhat ultimate sense, it is *not* all right. If I say it is the work of the Asuric powers, we are involved in a hard and fast dualism starring (as the films say) Hitler as the chief Asura. It is hard to know what to say without being liable to be misunderstood in some way or other.

To start with, the war that is raging is not the real war. It is the troubled wake of a ship that has gone on out of sight; it is the trail of slime behind a snail; it is the pathway of dead ash left by a forest fire. "By Me *already* have these men been slain," said Krishna. The ship, the snail, the forest fire—these have already gone on ahead in the inner worlds. Because we have eyes for nothing but material things we do not see them but see only the dead ash they have left behind. Therefore I say it is illusion because it is not what we think it is. It is not that "coming events cast their shadows before"—but that inner realities throw their shadows behind and beneath and we—we live in those shadows and take them for realities. This war is not being fought nor will it be won or lost. It has been fought and won, though what that victory will taste like to us, poor fools, when we, wandering along in our trail of ash, catch up with it, is more than I can say. The victory of Krishna is certain, but if, as is usual, our hopes are set on falsities, that victory may be but dust and ashes in *our* mouths. This war is part of the Divine Lila. Is it therefore "all right—God's in Heaven" sort of thing? The question should be: *"all right for whom?"* For those whose life is rooted in Reality it is "all right," but for those of us who cling to falsehood and mere outwardness it is not at *all right*.

You are appalled at the bitter waves of overt suffering that are sweeping over huge areas of our world. Many people think that Hitler has *caused* it—were it not for him it would not be. That is quite false. It is we, we, we who have been piling up that sorrow. When we take a photograph the image is impressed upon the sensitive plate, but not till it has been treated with developers does that image appear. This suffering is the photograph upon our sensitive psyches. We exposed them (as the photographers say) to a false view of the world, and now that false view is being developed in hateful black and white. But it was no less *there* when not manifest to any eyes but those that see within.

Why should you be so surprised that, as you say, "the Asuric powers should succeed so signally" when we—men in general—have given them such lodging space in our hearts? Why does a cholera outbreak sweep a whole great city? Let us try and understand that without being put off by shallow modern half-truths about germs and such like. Let us see such a thing as it really is *tathābhutam* as the Buddhists say and we shall understand this present outbreak.

These Hitlers and what nots are mere puppets worked by strings which neither they nor others see, great waves that dash upon our breakwaters to overwhelm them or to recoil in baffled fury. The force of Hitler is the force we have given him, we who project on others *the devil* that lurks within ourselves. He has risen on the wings of our hatred and fear just as, in dream, monsters created by ourselves rush on us with *our* power. Remember the profound Pauranic story of how when Brahmā created the Rakshasas they rushed on him to devour *him*. Just so does a figure like Hitler, clothed in the projections of a whole world's secret wishes and fears, rushed upon us. Like the Gaderene swine of the Gospel, he is the vehicle of all the devils we project from ourselves and in the end his fate will be that of those swine who "rushed down a steep place into the sea." For (and this I say subject to the limitations of my knowledge of him) he has or would appear to have accepted those projected devils and clasped them to him. No man is forced to accept such projections against his will. If he refuses them resolutely they cannot cling to him but return whence they came. *Curses like chickens return home to roost.* He however who accepts them, forthwith becomes their servant, gaining, like Marlowe's Faustus, powers for the time being, but ultimately being rent in pieces by the devils to whom he has given himself. This, unless my vision of him is quite wrong—and I have striven to judge with as much detachment as possible—is what will happen to him. An inner disruption, a tearing in pieces of his psyche, is certain, and, since inner events are reflected outside, it is even likely that that inner disruption will have its outer embodiment so that the pitiable men will perish miserably at the hands of the passions he has given himself to be the servant of.

It is just no use our being appalled by what we now see. Things are not worse because they become manifest and these horrors were with us all the time. In the (sometimes) pleasant and fair life of peace in our great cities—East or West—these ghastly figures were standing at our elbows, lying under our feet unseen by most and yet they were as much there *then* as they are *now*. I am not talking philosophy, but just fact.

You write that sometimes, when you were depressed lately, you felt like the Mayavadi (illusionist) that "this world is too beastly a place to be open to redemption." But this view is superficial. You start by taking *this world* as a thing in itself and then suppose that the Mayavadin condemns it or rejects and condemns it. But what the real Mayavadin means (and only he should count) by *this world* is nothing more than a wrong view of Reality and such a wrong view is undoubtedly beastly and must be rejected. Incidentally, don't imagine that by the word *view* I mean a mere mental view: I mean something much deeper than a creed held by that little corner of our being which we call our conscious mind.

However, to come back to the war, you ask what I think will happen. I *know* that the Soul alone will prevail and that its purposes will be carried out. In that we can rest in utter certainty. As Jesus put it: "Heaven and earth shall pass away but my works shall not pass away." These *words* are the Logos, the Vedic *Rita* or Cosmic Harmony in which the very Gods have their being. So much I know. As for what I think, I *think* that England has still some purposes of the Soul to manifest, and if so, in spite of all faults, she will remain resisting all assaults until those purposes are accomplished after which, who cares, for when the work in the field is done the worker returns home. For the rest, something that speaks in every drop of my blood tells me that England will neither yield nor be defeated in this war (though as I have already said, I do not know how she will like the taste of the peace to follow) and however grim appearances may be I hold to that conviction. There is no need for a "miracle." Subject to the corrections aforesaid England cannot go under. Of course that is a big proviso (namely, if she manifests some purposes of the soul) but it is the only thing that matters—all the rest is illusion and a clinging to falsities.

You write that I wrote to you once years ago that I didn't mind the world's misery so much because the misery of the world acts as a foil as it were in order to set off the beauty and glory of Krishna. I don't remember what exactly I wrote. I think I must have said it in some special context or other, but, if not, then it was just one of the exaggerated remarks one is apt to indulge in sometimes when emotion gains the upper hand.

However, don't you worry about the Divine's "manifesting with a greater effectiveness his Truth against the Asuric forces." He will do that all right if we give him something to manifest in or through. Let us not give way to the childish longing for "miracle." Instead of longing for Divine intervention, like some people who long for American intervention, let us fight our own battle (those of us who are removed from physical fighting just as much and even more than those who are not) and we can be utterly confident that in proportion as we offer in our souls any foothold for the Divine values, to that extent the unconquerable Divine Power will manifest. Those of us who are removed from the overt conflict have a greater opportunity (and therefore a greater responsibility) for seeing things as they are and then of hastening the only thing that matters: the ultimate and inevitable triumph of the Divine.

In any case the really awful thing is not the War but the state of world-psyche (of which we are parts) which made that War occur as inevitably as a certain state of the physical body issues in a rash upon the skin. Do not blame the Asuric Powers as stupid people blame *governments*. Those Powers work in and through us for our being is much greater than appears and though our feet tread this dark earth, our heads are far beyond it and the Divine Sun and Moon themselves are our eyes.

It is time I stopped! Thanks again for your poems of which I particularly liked the translations from the Kavirpanthi and the Sufi.

Love always Dilip,
Yours ever
Krishnaprem

Dilip,

I am afraid I can hold out but cold comfort—for the present, at least,—to those of your correspondents who are lamenting the present state of things. Things *are* bad, are growing worse and may, at any time, grow worse or worse than the worst if that is possible, and anything however paradoxical seems possible in the present perturbed world. The best thing for them is to realise that all this was necessary because certain possibilities had to emerge and be got rid of if a new and better world was at all to come into being; it would not have done to postpone them for a later time. It is, as in Yoga, where things active or latent in the being have to be put into action in the light so that they may be grappled with and thrown out or to merge from latency in the depths for the same purificatory purpose. Also they can remember the adage that night is darkest before dawn and that the coming of dawn is inevitable. But they must remember too, that the new world whose coming we envisage is not to be made of the same texture as the old and different only in pattern, and that it must come by other means, from within and not from without, so the best way is not to be too much preoccupied with the lamentable things that are happening outside, but themselves to grow within so that they may be ready for new world whatever the form it may take.

Sri Aurobindo

Dilip,

It was a great refreshment to read the letters of Krishnaprem; one feels here a stream from the direct sources of Truth that one does not meet so often as one could desire. Here is a mind that can not only think but see—and not merely see the surfaces of things with which most intellectual thought goes on wrestling without end or definite issue and as if there were nothing else, but look into the core. The Tantriks have a phrase *Pashyanti Vak* to describe one level of the *vak-shakti*, the seeing Word. Krishnaprem has, it seems to me, much of the *Pashyanti Buddhi*, the seeing Intelligence. It might be because he has passed beyond thought into experience, but there are many who have a considerable wealth of experience without its clarifying their eye of thought to this extent; the soul feels, but the mind goes on with mixed and imperfect transcriptions, blurs and confusions in the idea. There must have been the gift of right vision lying ready in his nature.

It is an achievement to have got rid so rapidly and decisively of the shimmering mists and fogs which modern intellectualism takes for Light of Truth. The modern mind has so long and persistently wandered—and we with it—in the Valley of the False Glimmer that it is not easy for anyone to disperse its mists with the sunlight of clear vision so soon and entirely as he has done. All that he says about modern humanism and humanitarianism, the vain efforts of the sentimental idealist and the ineffective intellectual, about synthetic electicism and other kindred things is admirably clear-minded: it hits the target. It is not by these means that humanity can get that radical change of its ways of life which is yet becoming imperative, but only by reaching the bed-rock of Reality behind,—not through mere ideas and mental formations, but by a change of the consciousness, an inner and spiritual conversion. But that is a truth for which it would be difficult to get a hearing in the present noise of all kinds of many-voiced clamour and confusion and catastrophe.

A distinction, the distinction very keenly made here, between the plane of phenomenal process, of externalised Prakriti, and the plane of Divine Reality ranks among the first words of the inner wisdom. The turn Krishnaprem gives to it is not merely an ingenious explanation, it expresses very soundly one of the clear certainties you meet when you step across the border and look at the outer world from the standing-ground of the inner spiritual experience. The more you go inward or upward, the more the view of things changes and the outer knowledge science organises takes its real and very limited place. Science, like most mental and external knowledge, gives you only truth of process. I would add that it cannot give you even the whole truth of process; for you seize some of the ponderables, but miss the all-important imponderables; you get, hardly even the how, but the conditions under which things happen in Nature. After all, the triumphs and marvels of Science, the explaining principle, the rationale, the significance of the whole is left as dark, as mysterious and even more mysterious than ever. The scheme it has built up of the evolution not only of this rich and vast variegated material world, but of life and consciousness and mind and their workings out of a brute mass of electrons, identical and varied only in arrangement and number is an irrational magic more baffling than any the most mystic imagination could conceive. Science in the end lands us in a paradox effectuated, an organised and rigidly determined accident, an impossibility that has somehow happened: it has shown us a new, a material Maya, *aghatana-ghatana-patiyasi*, very clever at bringing about the impossible, a miracle that cannot logically be and yet somehow is there

—actual, irresistibly organised, but still irrational and inexplicable. And this is evidently because science has missed something essential: it has seen and scrutinised what has happened and in a way how it has happened, but it has shut its eyes to something that made this impossible possible, something it is there to express. There is no fundamental significance in things if you miss the Divine Reality; for you remain embedded in a huge surface crust, of manageable and utilisable appearance. It is the magic of the Magician you are trying to analyse, but only when you enter into the consciousness of the Magician himself can you begin to experience the true origination, significance and circles of the Lila. I say "begin" because, as you suggest, the Divine Reality is not so simple that at the first touch you can know all of it or put it into a single formula; it is Infinite and opens before you an infinite knowledge to which all science put together is a bagatelle. But still you do touch the essential, the eternal behind things and in the light of That all begins to be profoundly luminous, intimately intelligible.

I have once before told you what I think of the ineffective peckings of certain well-intentioned scientific minds on the surface or apparent surface of the spiritual Reality behind things and I need not elaborate it here.* Krishnaprem's prognostic of a greater danger in the new attack by the adversary against the validity of spiritual and supraphysical experience, their new strategy of destruction by admitting and explaining it in their new sense, is interesting enough and there is strong ground for the apprehension he expresses. But I doubt whether if, once these things are admitted to scrutiny, the mind of humanity will long remain satisfied with explanations so ineptly superficial and external explanations that explain nothing. If the defenders of religion take up an unsound position, easily capturable, when they affirm only the subjective validity of spiritual experience, the opponents also seem to me to be giving away, without knowing it, the gates of the materialistic stronghold by their consent at all to admit and examine spiritual and supraphysical experience. Their entrenchment in the physical field, their refusal to admit or even examine supraphysical things was their tower of strong safety; once it is abandoned, the human mind pressing towards something less negative, more helpfully positive will pass to it over the dead bodies of their theories and the broken debris of their annulling explanations and ingenious psychological labels. Another danger may then arise not of a final denial of the Truth, but the repetition in old or new forms of a past mistake: on one side some revival of blind fanatical obscurantist sectarian religionism, on the other a stumbling into the pits and quagmires of the vitalistic occult and the pseudo-spiritual mistakes that made the whole real strength of the materialistic attack on the past and its credos. But these are phantasms that meet us always on the border line or in the intervening country between the material darkness and the perfect splendour. In spite of all, the victory of the supreme Light even in the darkened earth-consciousness stands as the one ultimate certitude.

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* Sri Aurobindo wrote in a letter to D.K.R. about Professor Eddington's "Science and the Unseen World": "The part about the changed attitude of modern Science to its own field of discovery is interesting. . . . The latter part of this book about religious experience I find very feeble; it gives me the impression of a hen scratching the surface of the earth to find a scrap or two of food—nothing deeper."

Art, poetry, music are not Yoga, not in themselves things spiritual any more than philosophy is a thing spiritual or Science. There lurks here another curious incapacity of the modern intellect—its inability to distinguish between mind and spirit, its readiness to mistake mental, moral, and aesthetic idealisms for spirituality and their inferior degrees for spiritual values. It is mere truth, the mental intuitions of the metaphysician or the poet for the most part fall far short of a concrete spiritual experience; they are distant flashes, shadowy reflections, not rays from the centre of Light. It is not less true that, looked at from the peaks, there is not much difference between the high mental eminences and the lower climbings of this external existence. All the energies of the *Lila* are equal in the sight from above, all are disguises of the Divine. But one has to add that all can be turned into a first means towards the realisation of the Divine. A philosophic statement about the Atman is a mental formula, not knowledge, not experience, yet sometimes the Divine takes it as a channel of touch, strangely a barrier in the mind breaks down, something is seen, a profound change operated in some inner part, there enters into the ground of the nature something calm, equal, ineffable; one stands upon a mountain ridge and glimpses or mentally feels a wideness, a pervasiveness, a nameless Vast in Nature, then suddenly there comes the touch, a revelation, a flooding, the mental loses itself in the spiritual, one bears the first invasion of the Infinite. Or you stand before a temple of Kali beside a sacred river and see what?—a sculpture, a gracious piece of architecture, but in a moment, mysteriously, unexpectedly there is instead a Presence, a Power, a Face that looks into yours, an inner sight in you has regarded the World Mother. Similar touches can come through art, music, poetry to their creator, or to one who feels the shock of the word, the hidden significance of a form, a message in the sound that carries more perhaps than was consciously meant by the composer. All things in the Lila can turn into windows that open on the hidden Reality. Still, so long as one is satisfied with looking through windows, the gain is only initial; one day one will have to take up the pilgrim's staff and start out to journey there where the Reality is for ever manifest and present. Still less can it be spiritually satisfying to remain with shadowy reflections; a search imposes itself for the Light which they strive to figure. But since this Reality and this Light are in ourselves no less than in some high region above the mortal plane, we can in the seeking for it use many of the figures and activities of life; as one offers a flower, a prayer, an act to the Divine, one can offer too a created form of beauty, a song, a poem, an image, a strain of music, and gain through it a contact, a response or an experience. And when that divine consciousness has been entered or when it grows within, then too its expression in life through these things is not excluded from Yoga, these creative activities can still have their place, though not intrinsically a greater place than any other than can be put to divine use and service. Art, poetry, music, as they are in their ordinary functioning, create mental and vital, not spiritual values; but they can be turned to a higher end, and then, like all things that are capable of linking our consciousness to the Divine, they are transmuted and become spiritual and can be admitted as part of a life of Yoga. All takes new values not from itself, but from the consciousness that uses it; for there is only one thing essential, needful, indispensable, to grow conscious of the Divine Reality and live in it and live it always.

17-3-32. SRI AUROBINDO

* * *

Dilip,

As for Sri Aurobindo's gracious and encouraging observations about the views occurring in my letters to you, I only wish I could consider myself really worthy of the praises he bestows. It is a great privilege to have had his commentary. Please convey to him and to the Mother my reverent pranams. On the two points on which he has suggested slight modifications of my views I have little to say. I sincerely hope that the mass of men will march firmly forward over the littered debris of the psychological theories. So they perhaps certainly would if they remained with their present outlook, but there is the danger of a change in the average man's being brought about by the powerful forces of modern education directed by the purely intellectual emotional ideal. An instance of what I meant has just come to hand in the shape of a book by the great psychologist Jung who has written a commentary on a Chinese book of Yoga entitled "The Secret of the Golden Flower." The book is a good one though obscure (perhaps intentionally so), and, knowing nothing of bhakti, Jung, in his commentary, has many interesting and some very pertinent things to say. On a superficial reading one might be tempted to say, "At last! here is a genuine scientist really beginning to see something in Yoga after all." On more careful reading however, it becomes apparent that here is no acceptance, but a deadly misinterpretation, the more dangerous because of its great subtlety and partial truth. It is, in fact, a supreme effort to wrest the Divine experiences of religion or Yoga out of the hands of Bhagavan (God) and to put them into the hands of man, of man *as* man, ready harnessed to do his bidding. Remember in this connection the true saying in the *Conversations of the Mother* that "Yoga is not for the sake of humanity but for the sake of the Divine."

As for Sri Aurobindo's profound observations on art, etc., I fully agree. Art and science, like everything else, may be transmuted by Yoga. In themselves they are not Yoga. Historically, religion has been the greatest spring of artistic inspiration. If I said little about the positive value of science and art it was because there is little danger that these estimable pursuits will be under-valued now-a-days. The great danger arising from art is that poets use mystic phrases like the famous "light that never was on sea or land"—to describe, not the real object, which, generally, they have never seen, but some pale emotional reflex of it which thereupon comes to be accepted as *the* Reality. True art is a great thing, a very great thing, but it is not the greatest and it may not and must not usurp the *simhasana* (lofty throne).

Religion or Yoga—call it what you will—is one thing. It is not the pursuit of knowledge for the sake of power, or even for its own sake, though the mystic may pursue knowledge. It is not the creation of beautiful forms, though the mystic may reveal beauty. It is not the thinking of sublime thoughts about cloudy abstractions, though the mystic's thoughts may well be sublime. It is not the service of suffering humanity, though the saint loves all beings with a love which, in the words of the Buddha, is like the love of a mother for her only child . . . Still less is it the blowing of oneself up like a frog with yogic exercises till one bursts into the Void. It is the utter and entire giving of oneself to Sri Krishna, claiming nothing, asking nothing, desiring nothing but to be allowed to give oneself. All acts that help or symbolise this giving are Sadhana. All acts consequent on this giving are parts of His Divine Lila . . .

With love always from
KRISHNAPREM

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Dilip,

Krishnaprem's last letter is as refreshing as its predecessors; he always takes things by the right end, and his way of putting them is delightfully pointed and downright, as is natural to one who has got to the root of the matter. But I find it difficult to take Jung and the psychologists very seriously—though perhaps one ought to, for half-knowledge is a very powerful thing and can be a great obstacle to the coming in front of True Truth. No doubt, they are very remarkable men in their own field; but this new psychology looks to me very much like children learning some summary and not very adequate alphabet, exulting in putting their a. b. c. d. of the subconscient and the mysterious underground super-ego together and imagining that their first book of obscure beginnings (c-a-t = cat, t-r-e-e = tree) is the foundation of all knowledge. They look from down up and explain the higher heights by the lower obscurities; but the foundation of things is above and not below, "*upari budhna esham.*" The super-conscient, not the sub-conscient, is the true foundation of things. The significance of the lotus is not to be found by analysing the secrets of the mud from which it grows here; its secret is to be found in the heavenly archetype of the lotus that blooms for ever in the Light above. The self-chosen field of these psychologists is, besides, poor and dark and limited; you must know the whole before you can know the part, and the highest before you can truly understand the lowest. That is the province of a greater psychology awaiting its hour before which these poor gropings will disappear and come to nothing.

SRI AUROBINDO

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Dilip,

All criticism of poetry is bound to have a strong subjective element and that is the source of the violent differences in the appreciation of any given author by equally "eminent" critics. All is relative here, Art and Beauty also, and our view of things and our appreciation of them depend on the consciousness which views and appreciates. Some critics recognise this and go in frankly for subjective criticism—"this is why I like this and disapprove of that, I give my own values." Most, however, want to fit their personal likes and dislikes to some standard of criticism which they conceive to be objective; this need of objectivity, of the support of some impersonal truth independent of our personality, is the main source of theories, canons, standard of art. But the theories, canons, standards themselves vary and are set up in one age only to be broken in another. Is beauty a creation of our minds, a construction of our ideas and our senses, but not existent otherwise? In that case beauty is non-existent in Nature, it is put upon Nature by our minds through *adhyaropa* (projection). But this contradicts the fact that it is in response to an object and not independently of it that the idea of beautiful or not beautiful originally rises within us. Beauty does exist in what we see, but there are two aspects of it, essential beauty and the form it takes. "Eternal beauty wandering on her way" does that wandering by a multitudinous variation of forms appealing to a multitudinous variation of consciousness. There comes in the difficulty. Each individual consciousness tries to seize the eternal beauty expressed in a form (here a particular poem or work of art), but is either assisted by the form or repelled by it, wholly attracted or wholly repelled, or partially attracted and partially repelled. There may be errors in the poet's or artist's transcription of beauty which mar the reception, but even these have different effects on different people. But the more radical divergences arise from the variation in the constitution of the mind and its responses. Moreover, there are minds, the majority indeed, who do not respond to "artistic" beauty at all—something inartistic appeals much more to what sense of beauty they have—or else they are not seeking beauty, but only vital pleasure.

A critic cannot escape altogether from these limitations. He can try to make himself catholic and objective and find the merit or special character of all he reads or sees in poetry and art, even when they do not evoke his special sympathy or deepest response. I have no temperamental sympathy for much of the work of Pope and Dryden, but I can see their extraordinary perfection or force in their own field, the masterly conciseness, energy, point, metallic precision into which they cut their thought and their verse, and I can see too how that can with a little infusion of another quality be the basis of a really great and poetic style, as Dryden himself has shown in his best work. But there my appreciation stops; I cannot rise to the heights of admiration of those who put them on a level with or on a higher level than Wordsworth, Keats or Shelley—I cannot escape from the feeling that their work, even though more consistently perfect within their limits and in their own manner (at least Pope's), was less great in poetic quality. All this rises from a conception of beauty and a feeling for beauty which belongs to the temperament. Housman's exaltation of Blake results directly from his peculiar conception of poetic beauty as appealing to an inner sensation and deflowered by coherent intellectual thought. But that I shall not discuss now. This, however, does not mean that all criticism is useless. The critic can help to open the mind to the kinds of beauty he himself sees and not only to discover but to appreciate at their full value certain elements that make them beautiful or give them what is most characteristic or unique in their peculiar beauty. Housman, for instance, may help many minds to see in Blake something which they did not see before. They may not agree with him in his comparison of Blake and Shakespeare, but they can follow him to a certain extent and seize better that element in poetic beauty which he overstresses but makes at the same time more vividly visible.

Yes, of course, there is an intuition of greatness by which the great poet or artist is distinguished from those who are less great and these again from the not-great-at-all. But you are asking too much when you expect this intuition to work with a mechanical instantaneousness and universality so that all shall have the same opinion and give the same values. The greatness of Shakespeare, of Dante, of others of the same rank is unquestioned and unquestionable, for the recognition of it has always been there in their own time and afterwards. Virgil and Horace stood out in their own day in the first rank among the poets and that verdict has never been reversed since. The area of their fame may vary; it may have been seen first by a few, then by many, then by all. At first there may be adverse critics and assailants, but these negative voices die away. Questionings may rise from time to time —e.g., as to whether Lucretius was not a greater poet than Virgil—but these are usually from individuals and the general verdict abides always. Even lesser poets retain their rank in spite of fluctuations of their fame. You speak of the discrediting of some and the rehabilitation of the discredited. That happened to Pope and Dryden. Keats and his contemporaries broke their canons and trampled over their corpses to reach romantic freedom; now there is a rehabilitation. But all this is something of an illusion—for mark that even at the worst Pope and Dryden retained a place among the great names of English poetic literature. No controversy, no depreciation could take that away from them. This proves my contention that there is an abiding intuition of poetic and artistic greatness.

The attempts at comparison by critics like Housman and Eliot? It seems to me that these are irrelevant and otiose. Both Dante and Shakespeare stand at the summit of poetic fame, but each with so different a way of genius that comparison is unprofitable. Shakespeare has powers that Dante cannot rival; Dante has heights which Shakespeare could not reach; but in essence they stand as mighty equals. As for Blake and Shakespeare, that is more a personal fantasy than anything else. Purity and greatness are not the same thing; Blake's may be pure poetry in Housman's sense and Shakespeare's not except in a few passages; but nobody can contend that Blake's genius had the width and volume and richness of Shakespeare's. If you say that Blake as a mystic poet was greater than Shakespeare,—of course he was—for Shakespeare was not a mystic poet at all. But as a poet of the play of life Shakespeare is everywhere and Blake nowhere. There are tricks of language and idiosyncrasies of preference. One has to put each thing in its place without confusing issues and then one can see that Housman's praise of Blake may be justified, but the exaltation of him above Shakespeare on the whole is not in accordance with the abiding intuition of these things which remains undisturbed by any individual verdict.

The errors of great poets in judging their contemporaries are personal freaks—that is to say, failures in intuition due to the mind's temporary movements getting in the way of the intuition. The errors of Goethe and Bankim were only an over-estimation of a genius or a talent that was new and therefore attractive at the time. Richardson's *Pamela* was after all the beginning of modern fiction. As I have said, the general intuition does not work at once and with a mechanical accuracy. Over-estimation of a contemporary is frequent, under-estimation also. But, taken on the whole, the real poet commands at first the verdict of the few whose eyes are open—and often the attacks of those whose eyes are shut—and the few grow in numbers till the general intuition affirms their verdict. There may be exceptions, for there is hardly a rule without exceptions, but this is, I think, generally true.

As for the verdict of Englishmen upon a French poet or *vice-versa,* that is due to a difficulty in entering into the finer spirit and subtleties of a foreign language. It is difficult for a Frenchman to get a proper appreciation of Keats or Shelley, or for an Englishman to judge Racine for this reason. But a Frenchman like Maurois, who knows English as an Englishman knows it, can get the full estimation of a poet like Shelley all right. These variations must be allowed for; the human mind is not a perfect instrument, its best intuitions are much veiled by irrelevant mental formations; but in these matters the truth asserts itself and stands fairly firm and clear in essence through all changes of mental weather.

SRI AUROBINDO

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Dilip,

I cannot say that I follow very well the logic of your doubts. How does a noble and selfless friend suffering in a prison-hospital invalidate the hope of yoga? There are many dismal spectacles in the world, but that is after all the very reason why yoga has to be done. If the world were all happy and beautiful and ideal, who would want to change it or find it necessary to bring down a higher consciousness into the earthly Mind and Matter? Your other argument is that the work of the yoga itself is not easy—not a happy canter to the goal. Of course it isn't because the world and human nature are what they are. I never said it was easy or that there were not obstinate difficulties in the way of the endeavour.

Again I do not understand your point about raising up a new race by my going on writing trivial letters ten hours a day. Of course not—nor by writing important letters either; even if I were to spend my time writing fine poems it would not build up a new race. Each activity is important in its own place: an electron or a molecule or a grain may be small things in themselves, but in their place they are indispensable to the building up of a world; it cannot be made up only of mountains and sunsets and streamings of the aurora borealis—though these have their place there. All depends on the force behind these things and the purpose in their action—and that is known to the Cosmic Spirit which is at work; and It works, I may add, not by the mind or according to human standards but by a greater consciousness which, starting from an electron, can build up a world and, using a tangle of ganglia, can make them the base here for the works of the Mind and Spirit in Matter, produce a Ramakrishna, a Napoleon, a Shakespeare. Is the life of a great poet, either, made up only of magnificent and important things? How many trivial things had to be dealt with and done before there could be produced a King Lear or a Hamlet?

Again, according to your own reasoning, would not people be justified in mocking at your pother—so they would call it, I do not—about metre and scansion and how many ways a syllable can be read? Why, they might say, is Dilip Roy wasting his time in trivial prosaic things like this while he might have been spending it in producing a beautiful lyric or fine music? But the worker knows and respects the material with which he must work and he knows why he is busy with "trifles" and small details and what is their place in the fulness of his labour.

SRI AUROBINDO

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Dilip,

To me the ultimate value of a man is not to be measured by what he says, nor even by what he does, but by what he becomes.

Nobody can write my life because it has not been on the surface for man to see.

Human beings are less deliberate and responsible for their acts than the moralists, novelists and dramatists make them and I look rather to see what forces drove them than what the man himself may have seemed by inference to have intended or purposed. Our inferences are often wrong and, even when they are right, touch only the surface of the matter.

As for the question whether Heaven wants Man, the answer is that if Heaven did not want him he would not want Heaven. It is from Heaven that the longing and aspiration for Immorality have come, and it is the godhead within him that carries it as a seed.

Sri Aurobindo

* * *

Dilip,

The passage you have quoted is my considered estimate of Sri Ramakrishna.

"Nor would a successive practice of each of the yogas in turn be easy in the short span of our human life and with our limited energies, to say nothing of the waste of labour implied in so cumbrous a process. Sometimes, indeed, Hathayoga and Rajayoga are thus successively practiced. And in a recent unique example, in the life of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, we see a colossal spiritual capacity first diving straight to the Divine realisation, taking as it were the kingdom of heaven by violence and then seizing upon one yogic method after another and extracting the substance out of it with an incredible rapidity, always to return to the heart of the whole matter, the realisation and possession of God by the power of love, by the extension of inborn spirituality into various experience and by the spontaneous play of an intuitive knowledge.". . . (*Synthesis of Yoga.*)

It is a misunderstanding to suppose that I am against

Bhakti or against emotional Bhakti—which comes to the same thing, since without emotion there can be no Bhakti. It is rather the fact that in my writings on Yoga I have given Bhakti the highest place. All that I have said at any time which could account for this misunderstanding was against an *unpurified* emotionalism which, according to my experience, leads to want of balance, agitated and disharmonious expression or even contrary reactions and, at its extreme, nervous disorder. But the insistence on purification does not mean that I condemn true feeling and emotion any more than the insistence on a purified mind or will means that I condemn thought and will. On the contrary the deeper the emotion, the more intense the Bhakti, the greater is the force for realisation and transformation. It is oftenest through intensity of emotion that the psychic being awakes and there is an opening of the inner doors in the Divine.

3-2-32. SRI AUROBINDO

* * *

Dilip,

You quote from Lowes Dickinson where he says: "Surely, if one didn't approach the question with an irrational basis towards optimism, one would never imagine that there is such a thing as progress in anything that matters. Or, are even we here impressed by such silly and irrelevant facts as telephones and motor-cars? . . . If we are to look for progress at all we must look for it, I suppose, in men. And I have never seen any evidence that men are generally better than they used to be: on the contrary, I think there is evidence that they are worse."

Were not his later views greyed over by the sickly cast of disappointed idealism? I have not myself an exaggerated respect for Humanity and what it is—but to say that there has been no progress at *all* is as much an exaggerated pessimism as the rapturous hallelujahs of the nineteenth century to a Progressive Humanity were an exaggerated optimism. . . . After all the best way to make Humanity progress is to move on oneself: this may sound either individualistic or egoistic if you will, but it isn't, it is only common sense. As the Gita says: "*Yadyadacharati shreshtah tattadevetaro janah*" ("Whatever the élite do is taken as the model by the rest.")

There are always unregenerate parts tugging people backwards, and who is not divided? But it is best to put one's trust in the soul, the spark of the Divine within and foster that till it rises into a sufficient flame.

SRI AUROBINDO

* * *

Dilip,

I should like to say something about the Divine Grace—for you seem to think it should be something like a Divine Reason acting upon lines not very different from those of human intelligence. But it is not that. Also it is not a universal Divine Compassion either acting impartially on all who approach it or acceding to all prayers. It does not select the righteous and reject the sinner. The Divine Grace came to the aid of Tarsus, the persecutor, to St. Augustine, the profligate, to Jagai and Madhai of infamous fame, to Bilwamangal and many others whose conversion might well scandalise the puritanism of the human moral intelligence. But it can come to the righteous also—curing them of their self-righteousness and leading to a purer consciousness beyond these things. It is a power that is superior to any rule, even to the Cosmic Law—for all spiritual seers have distinguished between the Law and Grace. Yet it is not indiscriminate—only it has a discrimination of its own which sees things and persons and the right times and seasons with another vision than that of the Mind or any other normal Power. A state of Grace is prepared in the individual often behind thick veils by means not calculable by the mind and when the state of Grace comes then the Grace itself acts. There are these three powers: (1) the Cosmic Law of Karma or what else, (2) the Divine Compassion acting on as many as it can reach through the nets of the Law and giving them their chance and (3) the Divine Grace which acts more incalculably but also more irresistibly than the others. The only question is whether there is something behind all the anomalies of life which can respond to the call and open itself with whatever difficulty till it is ready for the illumination of the Divine Grace—and that *something* must be not a mental and vital movement but an inner something which can well be seen by the inner eye. If it is there and when it becomes active in front, then the Compassion can act, though the full action of the Grace may still wait attending the decisive decision or change; or this may be postponed to a future hour, because some portion or element of the being may still come between, something that is not yet ready to receive.

But why allow anything to come in the way between you and the Divine, any idea, any incident? When you are in full aspiration and joy, let nothing count, nothing be of any importance except the Divine and your aspiration. If one wants the Divine quickly, absolutely, entirely, that must be the spirit of approach, absolute, all-engrossing, making that the one point with which nothing else must interfere.

What value have mental ideas about the Divine, ideas about what he should be, how he should act, how he should not act—they can only come in the way. Only the Divine himself matters. When your consciousness embraces the Divine, then you can know what the Divine is, not before. Krishna is Krishna, one does not care what he did or did not do: only to see Him, meet Him, feel the Light, the Presence, the Love and *Ananda* is what matters. So it is always for the spiritual aspiration—it is the Law of the spiritual life.

SRI AUROBINDO

* * *

16-12-1936.

Guru,

Last night I was reading the book *World Predictions* by the world-famous astrologer Cheiro published in 1925. He did make some astonishing prophecies. To quote only one, as I am sending up the book to you so that you may read the others (pp. . . .) he writes about King George VI:

"In his case it is remarkable that the regal sign of Jupiter increases as the years advance." And then of the Prince of Wales: "His astrological chart shows perplexing and baffling influences that most unquestionably point to changes that are likely to take place greatly affecting the throne of England . . . he will fall a victim to a devastating love affair. If he does, I predict that the Prince will give up everything, even the chance of being crowned, rather than lose the object of his affection." (! ! !)

But if it was all pre-ordained, Guru, then it is evident that Shakespeare was wrong when he said:

"Our fault, dear Brutus, lies not in stars
But in ourselves that we are underlings."

And right when he said:

> *"Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player*
> *That struts and frets his hour upon the stage*
> *And then is heard no more: it is a tale*
> *Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,*
> *Signifying nothing."*

For I, for one, cannot help but look upon myself as an utter underling to have to accept, say, that it had been siderеally decided that Dilip would read a book at midnight on the fifteenth of December in the year of Grace, 1936, and would on the morrow write to his Guru about his deep dejection whereupon the latter would write off a deep reply on the morrow couched in words of wisdom. And then tell me, do these stars, by any chance, know what Your Wisdom is going to write tomorrow?

DILIP

* * *

Dilip,

Your extracts taken by themselves are very impressive, but when one reads the book, the impression made diminishes and fades away. You have quoted Cheiro's successes, but what about his failures? I have looked at the book and was rather staggered by the number of prophecies that have failed to come off. You can't deduce from a small number of predictions, however accurate, that all is pre-destined down to your putting the questions in the letter and my answer. It may be, but the evidence is not sufficient to prove it. What is evident is that there is an element of the predictable, predictable accurately and in detail as well as in large points, in the course of events. But that was already known; it leaves the question still unsolved whether *all* is predictable, whether destiny is the sole factor in existence or there are other factors also that can modify destiny,—or, destiny being given, there are not different sources or powers or planes of destiny and we can modify the one with which we started by calling in another destiny, source, power or plane and making it active in our life. Metaphysical questions are not so simple that they can be trenchantly solved either in one sense or another contradictory to it—that is the popular way of settling things but it is quite summary and inconclusive. All is free-will or else all is destiny—it is not so simple as that. This question of free will or determination is the most knotty of all metaphysical questions and nobody has been able to solve it—for a good reason, that both destiny and will exist and even a free will exists somewhere—the difficulty is only how to get at it and make it effective.

Astrology? Many astrological predictions came true, quite a mass of them, if one takes all together. But it does not follow that the stars rule our destiny; the stars may merely record a destiny that has been already formed; they are then a hieroglyph, not a Force,—or if their action constitutes a force, it is a transmitting energy, not an originating Power. Some one is there who has determined or something is there which is Fate, let us say; the stars are only indications. The astrologers themselves say that there are two forces *daiva* and *purushakara*, fate and individual energy, and the individual energy can modify and even frustrate. Moreover the stars often indicate several fate possibilities; for example that one may die in mid age, but that if that determination can be overcome, one can live to a predictable old age. Finally, cases are seen in which the predictions of the horoscope fulfil themselves with great accuracy up to a certain age, then apply no more. This often happens when the subject turns away from the ordinary to the spiritual life. If the turn is very radical the cessation of predictability may be immediate; otherwise certain results may still last on for a time, but there is no longer the same inevitability. This would seem to show that there is or can be a higher power or higher plane or higher source of spiritual destiny which can, if its hour has come, override the lower power, lower plane or lower source of vital and material fate of which the stars are indicators. I say vital because character can also be indicated from the horoscope and much more completely and satisfactorily than the events of the life.

The Indian explanation of fate is Karma. We ourselves are our own fate through our actions, but the fate created by us binds us; for what we have sown, we must reap in this life or another. Still we are creating our fate for the future even while undergoing old fate from the past in the present. That gives a meaning to our will and action and does not, as European critics wrongly believe, constitute a rigid and sterilising fatalism. But, again, our will and action can often annul or modify even the past Karma, it is only certain strong effects, called *utkat karma,* that are non-modifiable. Here too the achievement of the spiritual consciousness and life is supposed to annul or give the power to annul Karma. For we enter into union with the Will Divine cosmic or transcendent, which can annul what it had sanctioned for certain conditions, new-create what it had created, the narrow fixed lines disappear, there is a more plastic freedom and wideness. Neither Karma nor Astrology therefore point to a rigid and for ever immutable fate.

As for prophecy, I have never met or known of a prophet, however reputed, who was infallible. Some of their predictions came true to the letter; others do not, they half fulfil or miss fire entirely. It does not follow that the power of prophecy is unreal or that the accurate predictions can be all explained by probability, chance, coincidence. The nature and number of those that cannot is too great. The variability of fulfilment may be explained either by an imperfect power in the prophet sometimes active, sometimes failing or by the fact that things are predictable in part only, they are determined in part only or else by different factors or lines of power, different series of potentials and actuals. So long as one is in touch with one line, one predicts accurately, otherwise not—or if the line of power changes, one's prophecy also goes off the rails. All the same, one may say, there must be, if things are predictable at all, some power or plane through which or on which all is foreseeable; if there is a divine Omniscience and Omnipotence it must be so. Even then what is foreseen has to be worked out, actually is worked out by a play of forces,—spiritual, mental, vital and physical forces and in that plane of forces there is no absolute rigidity discoverable. Personal will or endeavour is one of those forces. Napoleon when asked why he believed in fate, yet was always planning and acting, answered "because it is fated that I should work and plan," in other words, his planning and acting were part of Fate, contributed to the results she had in view. *Even if I foresee an adverse result, I must work for the one that I consider should be: for it keeps alive the force, the principle of Truth which I serve and gives it a possibility to triumph hereafter and becomes part of the working of the future favourable Fate, even if the fate of the hour is adverse.* Men do not abandon a cause, because they have seen it all or foresee its failure; and they are spiritually right in their stubborn perseverance. *Moreover, we do not live for outward result alone; far more the object of life is the growth of the soul, not outward success of the hour or even of the near future. The soul can grow against or even by a material destiny that is adverse.*

Finally, even if all is determined, why say that Life is, in Shakespeare's phrase or rather Macbeth's "a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Life would rather be that if it were all chance and random incertitude. But if it is something foreseen, planned in every detail, does it not rather mean that if life does signify something, that there must be a secret purpose that is being worked up to, powerfully, persistently through the ages and ourselves are a part of it and fellow-workers in the fulfilment of that invincible Purpose?

17-12-1936. SRI AUROBINDO

P.S.—

Well, one of the greatest ecstasies possible is to feel oneself carried by the Divine, not by the stars or Karma, for the latter is a bad business, dry and uncomfortable —like being turned on a machine "*Yantrarudhani Mayaya.*"

18-12-36. SRI AUROBINDO

* * *

Dilip,

Seeing is of many kinds. There is the superficial seeing which only erects momentarily or for some time an image of the Being seen that brings no change unless the inner *bhakti* makes it a means for change. There is also the reception of the living image in one of its forms into oneself, say, in the heart, that can have an immediate effect or initiate a period of spiritual growth. There is also the seeing outside oneself in a more or less objective and subtle-physical way.

As for the "*milan,*" the abiding union is within and that can be there at all times; the outer *milan* or contact is not usually abiding. There are some who often or almost invariably have the contact whenever they worship; the Deity may become living to them in the picture or other image they worship, may move and act through it; others may feel Him always present, outwardly, subtle-physically, abiding with them where they live or in the very room, but sometimes this is only for a period. Or they may feel the presence with them, see it frequently in a body (but not materially except sometimes), feel its touch or embrace, converse with it constantly—that is also a kind of *milan*. The greatest *milan* is one in which one constantly aware of the Deity abiding in oneself, in everything in the world, holding all the world in him, identical with existence and yet supremely beyond the world—but in the world too one sees, hears, feels nothing but Him so that the very senses bear witness to Him alone.

28-4-43. SRI AUROBINDO

* * *

Guru,

Undoubtedly we should all stand for an all-out help to the Allies and all right-thinking men must agree with you that Hitler stands out now as such a supreme menace to civilization and spiritual values of mankind that the most urgent need of the hour is his downfall. But I just received (2-9-43) a long letter from X in which he objects to our comparing this holocaust to Kurukshetra and Hitler to Duryodhana and the Allies to the protagonists of *dharma* that the Pandavas were. "If I felt called to take part in the outer conflict I would certainly fight against Hitler with all my heart. But an outer Arjuna has not yet come within the range of my vision and that makes me suspicious . . . Is the roaring noise of the Anglo-American aeroplanes the twang of his great Gandiva bow?" I have also received many letters of late in which the writers assert that the Pandavas stood for *dharmarajya* whereas the Allies seem still imperialistic in their outlook—in the main, I mean. Should they continue to be so even after the War—what then? We will have helped them in their empire-building, not democracy-building, it is argued. I don't agree with these question-ers, but I do think that much that the Allies are doing may cause your standpoint to be misunderstood. That is why I ask you to be a little more explicit about this.

DILIP

* * *

1st September, 1943.

Dilip,

What we say is not that the Allies have not done wrong things, but that they stand on the side of the evolutionary forces. I have not said that at random, but on what to me are clear grounds of fact. What you speak of is the dark side. All nations and governments have been that in dealings with each other,—at least all who had the strength and got the chance. I hope you are not expecting me to believe that there are or have been virtuous governments and unselfish and sinless peoples? But there is the other side also. You are condemning the Allies on grounds that people in the past would have stared at, on the basis of modern ideals of international conduct; looked at like that, all have black records. But who created these ideals or did most to create them (liberty, democracy, equality, international justice and the rest)? Well, America, France, England—the present Allied nations. They have all been imperialistic and still bear the burden of their past, but they have also deliberately spread these ideals and spread too the institutions which try to embody them. Whatever the relative worth of these things—they have been a stage, even if a still imperfect stage of the forward evolution. (What about the others? Hitler, for example, says it is a crime to educate the coloured peoples, they must be kept as serfs and labourers.) England has helped certain nations to be free without seeking any personal gain; she has also conceded independence to Egypt and Eire after a struggle, to Iraq without a struggle. She has been moving away steadily, if slowly, from imperialism towards co-operation; the British Commonwealth of England and the Dominions is something unique and unprecedented, a beginning of new things in that direction; she is moving in idea towards a world-union of some kind in which aggression is to be made impossible; her new generation has no longer the old firm belief in mission and empire; she has offered India Dominion independence—or even sheer isolated independence, if she wants that, after the war, with an agreed free constitution to be chosen by Indians themselves . . . All that is what I call evolution in the right direction—however slow and imperfect and hesitating it may still be. As for America she has foresworn her past imperialistic policies in regard to Central and South America, she has conceded independence to Cuba and the Philippines . . . Is there a similar trend on the side of the Axis? One has to look at things on all sides, to see them steadily and whole. Once again, *it* is the *forces* working behind that I have to look at, I don't want to go blind among surface *details*. The future has to be safeguarded; only then can present troubles and contradictions have a chance to be solved and eliminated . . .

For us the question does not arise. We made it plain in a letter which has been made public* that we did not ers, but I do think that much that the Allies are doing may cause your standpoint to be misunderstood. That is why I ask you to be a little more explicit about this,

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*Sri Aurobindo wrote to a disciple (29-7-42) "You should not think of it as a fight for certain nations against others or even for India; it is a struggle for an ideal that has to establish itself on earth in the life of humanity, for a Truth that has yet to realise itself fully and against a darkness and falsehood that are trying to overcome the earth and mankind in the immediate future. It is the forces behind the battle that have to be seen and not this or that superficial circumstance. It is no use concentrating on the defects or mistakes of nations; all have defects and commit serious mistakes; but what matters is on what side they have ranged themselves in the struggle. It is a struggle for the liberty of mankind to develop, for conditions in

DILIP

* * *

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For us the question does not arise. We made it plain in a letter which has been made public* that we did not consider the war as a fight between nations and governments (still less between good people and bad people) but between two forces, the Divine and the Asuric. What we have to see is on which side men and nations put themselves; if they put themselves on the right side, they at once make themselves instruments of the Divine purpose in spite of all defects, errors, wrong movements and action which are common to human nature and all human collectivities. The victory of one side (the Allies) would keep the path open for the evolutionary forces: the victory of the other side would drag back humanity, degrade it horribly and might lead even, at the worst, to its eventual failure as a race, as others in the past evolution failed and perished. That is the whole question and all other considerations are either irrelevant or of a minor importance. The Allies at least have stood for human values, though they may often act against their own best ideals (human beings always do that); Hitler stands for diabolical values or for human values exaggerated in the wrong way until they become diabolical (e.g., the virtues of the Herrenvolk, the master race). That does

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* Sri Aurobindo wrote to a disciple (29-7-42) "You should not think of it as a fight for certain nations against others or even for India; it is a struggle for an ideal that has to establish itself on earth in the life of humanity, for a Truth that has yet to realise itself fully and against a darkness and falsehood that are trying to overcome the earth and mankind in the immediate future. It is the forces behind the battle that have to be seen and not this or that superficial circumstance. It is no use concentrating on the defects or mistakes of nations; all have defects and commit serious mistakes; but what matters is on what side they have ranged themselves in the struggle. It is a struggle for the liberty of mankind to develop, for conditions in

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which men have freedom and room to think and act according to the light in them and grow in the Truth, grow in the spirit. There cannot be the slightest doubt that if one side wins, there will be an end of all such freedom and hope of light and truth and the work that has to be done will be subjected to conditions which would make it humanly impossible; there will be a reign of falsehood and darkness, a cruel oppression and degradation for most of the human race such as people in this country do not dream of and cannot yet at all realise. If the other side that has declared itself for the free future of humanity triumphs this terrible danger will have been averted and conditions will have been created in which there will be a chance for the Ideal to grow, for the Divine work to be done; for the spiritual Truth for which we stand to establish itself on the earth. Those who fight for this cause are fighting for the Divine and against the threatened reign of the Asura."

not make the English or American nations of spotless angels nor the Germans a wicked and sinful race, but as an indicator it has a primary importance . . .

The Kurukshetra example is not to be taken as an exact parallel but rather as a traditional instance of the war between two world-forces in which the side favoured by the Divine triumphed, because the leaders made themselves his instruments. It is not to be envisaged as a battle between virtue and wickedness, the good and the evil men. After all, were even the Pandavas virtuous without defect, quite unselfish and without passions? . . .

Were not the Pandavas fighting to establish their own claims and interests—just and right, no doubt, but still personal claim and self-interest? Theirs was a righteous battle, *dharmayuddha,* but it was for right and justice, in their own case. And if imperialism, empire-building by armed force, is under all circumstances a wickedness, then the Pandavas are tinted with that brush, for they used their victory to establish their empire continued after them by Parikshit and Janamejaya. Could not modern humanism and pacifism make it a reproach against the Pandavas that these virtuous men (including Krishna) brought about a huge slaughter that they might become supreme rulers over all the numerous free and independent peoples of India? That would be the result of weighing old happenings in the scales of modern ideals. As a matter of fact such an empire was a step in the right direction then, just as a world-union of free peoples would be a step in the right direction now, in both cases the right consequences of a terrific slaughter . . .

We should remember that conquest and rule over subject peoples were not regarded as wrong either in ancient or mediaeval or quite recent times but as something great and glorious; men did not see any special wickedness in conquerors or conquering nations. Just government of subject peoples was envisaged but nothing more—exploitation was not excluded. The modern ideas on the subject, the right of all to liberty, both individuals and nations, the immorality of conquest and empire, or such compromises as the British idea of training subject races for democratic freedom, are new values, an evolutionary movement; this is a new *Dharma* which has only begun slowly and initially to influence practice,—an infant Dharma which would have been throttled for good if Hitler had succeeded in his "Avataric" mission and established his new "religion" over all the earth. Subject nations naturally accept the new Dharma and severely criticise the old imperialism; it is to be hoped that they will practise what they now preach when they themselves become strong and rich and powerful. But the best will be if a new world order evolves, even if at first stumblingly or incompletely, which will make the old things impossible—a difficult task, but not absolutely unachievable.

The Divine takes men as they are and uses men as His instruments even if they are not flawless in virtue, angelic, holy and pure. If they are of good will, if, to use the Biblical phrase, they are on the Lord's side, that is enough for the work to be done. Even if I knew that the Allies would misuse their victory or bungle the peace or partially at least spoil the opportunities open to the human world by that victory, I would still put my force behind them. At any rate things could not be one-hundredth part as bad as they would be under Hitler. The ways of the Lord would still be open—to keep them open is what matters. Let us stick to the real, the central fact, the need to remove the peril of black servitude and revived barbarism threatening India and the world, and leave for a later time all side-issues and minor issues or hypothetical problems that would cloud the one all important tragic issue before us.

3rd September, 1944. SRI AUROBINDO

As the next interview* I had with Sri Aurobindo bears mostly upon occult powers in Yoga and their impact on life, I may as well put on paper a relevant personal experience by way of a necessary preface. I hazard this primarily because it is calculated to throw some light on a theme which has been not a little darkened by so many misconceptions superstitious, scientific and otherwise. About the enlightened modern's rational scientific objections may I be permitted to begin with what Sri Aurobindo has since explained to me in a letter? The context is this: a friend of mine was visited in an omnibus (where she had no friend to help) with a terrible heart-attack (of thrombosis) and felt she was dying. She prayed to Sri Aurobindo and Mother and lo, she was cured "miraculously" and that in five minutes with not a trace of weakness left! She was impressed because thrombosis attacks leave their victims weak as waifs. I wrote to Sri Aurobindo whether she was imagining things or whether Mother *had* actually been aware of her appeal for help. To this Sri Aurobindo wrote back in a letter dated 24th March, 1949:

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* Note. All that I have written here has been at last sanctioned by Sri Aurobindo for publication. For he wrote to me at the time (1943): "I have made a few alterations. Most of it is unpublishable at the present time. . . . There are many subjects on which I have carefully avoided publicity up to now and the taboo continues." He lifted this taboo finally this year (1949) leaving intact practically everything except a few remarks he had made describing his own occult working in the world at large as he has his own reasons for not wanting to make these public at the present time.

"As to her experience, certainly her call for help did reach Mother even though all the details she relates in her letter might not have been present to the Mother's physical mind. Always calls of this kind are coming to the Mother, sometimes a hundred close upon each other and always the answer is given. The occasions are of all kinds, but whatever the need that occasions the call, the Force is there to answer it. That is the principle of this action on the occult plane. It is not of the same kind as an ordinary human action and does not need a written or oral communication from the one who calls: an interchange of psychic communication is quite sufficient to set the Force at work. At the same time it is not an impersonal Force and the suggestion of a divine energy that is there ready to answer and satisfy anybody who calls it is not at all relevant here. It is something personal to the Mother and if she had not this power and this kind of action she would not be able to do her work; but this is quite different from the outside practical working on the material plane where the methods must, necessarily, be different, although the occult working and the material working can and do join and the occult power gives to the material working its utmost efficacy. As for the one who is helped not feeling the Force at work, his knowing might help substantially the effective working, but it need not be indispensable: the effect can be there even if he does not know how the thing is done. For instance, in your work at Calcutta and elsewhere my help has always been with you and I don't think it can be said that it was ineffective; but it was of the same occult nature and could have had the same effect even if you had not been conscious in some way that my help was with you." (24th March, 1949)

Now for the personal experience:

I returned to Calcutta from Pondicherry in 1924 in a state of mind where the last traces of optimism, not to mention self-confidence, had been expunged now that there was no prospect of initiation in the near future. Do what I would, I could not keep my mind from brooding on his last words tantamount to a rebuff: "Yours is still a mental seeking: for my Yoga something more is needed." Years later I read in his description of Savitri what I had been feeling *then* from moment to moment:

> "A foundling of the gods she wanders here
> Like a child-soul left near the Gates of Hell
> Fumbling through fog in search of paradise . . .
> Brief are her snatches of felicity;
> She cherishes sorrow as her deepest call.
> A wanderer on forlorn despairing routes . . .
> Hunting for pleasure in the heart of pain."

But as the "snatches" became rarer and "the fog" deeper, the "routes" became more "despairing" still. At this juncture I heard a lecture of Swami Abhedananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramkrishna. He spoke among other things of *vairagya mevabhayam* and explained forcefully why turning away from life must mean deliverance from fear and bondage. I approached him and he kindly agreed to give me *diksha*—that is, initiation. But a friend of mine, a quondam disciple of Sri Aurobindo, intervened at the psychological moment and took me to consult a friend of his, a Yogi with remarkable occult powers. It was in a far-off village where we had to be his guests for the night. I told him how desperate was my need of a Guru and sought his advice. "Sit down and close your eyes," was all the answer he made. A little nettled, I obeyed all the same.

I don't know how long we sat there with closed eyes for a deepening peace had made me lose count of the passage of time; it filled every crevice of my thirsty soul. My friend gave me a nudge. I opened my eyes to meet my host's scrutinising me. I coloured. He smiled.

"But why are you hunting for a guru," he asked me abruptly, "now that Sri Aurobindo himself has accepted you?"

"But how can that be?" I asked sceptically. "I told you he hasn't."

"But I tell you he has."

My heart skipped a beat. "I don't understand," I faltered out. "Will you have the goodness to be a little more explicit?"

"But it is simplicity itself," he returned bluntly with a half smile; then, appraising me for a second or two, added almost casually: "He just appeared there—yes, just behind you—and told me to advise you to wait. He asked me to tell you that he would draw you to him as soon as you were ready. Is that explicit enough?"

His eyes twinkled in irony. I was puzzled: was he laughing at me—but then—

"Look here," he chimed in in his downright way, "shall I tell you something more convincing still?"

I held his eyes. . . . My heart beat faster.

He seemed to deliberate for a moment before he added: "Tell me: do you happen to have some ailment in your left abdomen?"

I stared at him in blank surprise. "But how did you know?"

"I didn't—that is, not before he told me."

"T—told you?" I stammered. "B—but who?"

He smiled in evident amusement. "Who else but your Guru—who came to tell me that you had already been advised by him to wait till the ailment was cured before you practised Yoga." He paused for a moment and then added: "But what is it?"

"It—it's hernia. A tug-of-war caused the rupture."

He beamed, a picture of complacency. "That explains it. For Yoga will mean pressure on these parts, the vitals. Maybe that's why he asked you to wait till it healed up."

"There you are wrong." I demurred. "For he told me that my seeking was still a mental one." Then I related to him the gist of our conversation in Pondicherry.

He listened very attentively and when I had come to the end of my story looked very kindly at me and said: "It's quite clear now. He wanted you to wait till you recognised in him your Guru. You don't today, evidently; for otherwise you wouldn't have dreamed even of going to another for guidance." He then went on to tell me many things about the forces that acted in and through Yoga, about Guruvada, about the hindrance of mental preconceptions and above all about the greatness of Sri Aurobindo and his endeavour to invoke a Force—the Supramental descent for which our minds and the earth-consciousness were still far from ready. He told me also how he had visioned in his meditations "the greatest Yogi of this age" (*'Yugāvatār'* was the word he used) and how he had seen also "the Mother" who was at once his disciple and collaborator of identical status. Lastly, he gave me some excellent practical directions as to how I might best profit by Sri Aurobindo's help during my novitiate.

I do not remember all that he told me but I will never forget his final warning.

"You have been called," he said. "But remember it is even more difficult to be chosen. For that you will have to surrender your will utterly to your Guru so that he may mould you as *he* will but not as *you* will, mind you. For this you must have faith—a complete faith in his superior wisdom, not only because he is your Guru but also because he has attained the peak of occult powers."

'*Yoga-bibhuti*' was the word he used.

I was thrilled. For I had never yet come face to face with 'occult powers' and such verifiable powers at that. I was especially impressed by the fact that he had told me the precise advice Sri Aurobindo had given me—a disciple of his, Moni, had communicated this to me in 1924—though I still wondered whether the assurance about Sri Aurobindo's waiting till I was ready for surrender might not, after all, be too good to be true! And last, though by no means least, I was now delivered once and for all from my sense of responsibility which, like a cruel horseman, kept goading me all the time to be more alert in my aspiration.

But the respite was brief; for, to crown my discomfiture as it were, I was caught in an emotional entanglement which only ended in another blind alley. This again, by the inscrutable chain of karma, made me decide to sail once more for Europe. And it so happened that, just at this critical moment, an invitation came to me, like manna from the sky: an agent of Edison's Gramophone Company wrote to me requesting me to make a few records for them in New York. My spirits revived and I sailed in March 1927 for France where something unexpected happened again to ruin my ambitious plans and cause my mental pendulum to swing back nostalgically to Pondicherry till New York seemed too unreal to be good. Exigencies of space compel me to be brief; moreover I do not want to let myself be carried away too far from my harbour on the crest of an autobiographical impulse; so I will confine myself only to what is germane to my story, namely, the occult power of the Visitant who like a mystic architect of our destiny,

> ". . . comes unseen into our darker parts
> And, curtained by the darkness, does his work . . .
> Till they too feel the need and will to change." *

What happened was this. I had read a great deal about the famous *côte d'azur*, the rendezvous of the East with the West. So from Marseilles I went straight to Nice to regain my equilibrium among other things. I knew not a soul there, but my music was instrumental once again in procuring me a number of friends who pressed me to give a lecture-demonstration of our music in the house of a Countess there. Someone who knew Paul Richard who happened to be there just then must have told him about it. The next morning he visited me at my hotel.

I was delighted. For I had heard a great deal about his intellectual eminence; I had admired his philosophical writings in the Arya which Sri Aurobindo had edited and continued to publish month after month for six long years; I had read his eulogy of Sri Aurobindo as *the* man of destiny of our derelict modern world. But what had impressed me most was the tribute paid to him by Rabindranath in Japan in the course of which he had written: "When I met Monsieur Richard in Japan, I became more reassured in my mind about the higher era of civilization than when I read about big schemes which the politicians are formulating for ushering the age of peace into the world. . . . When gigantic forces of destruction were holding orgies of fury, I saw this solitary young Frenchman, unknown to fame with his face beaming with the light of the new Dawn and his voice vibrating with the message of a New Life, and I felt sure that the great Tomorrow had already come, though not registered in the calender of the statesmen."

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*Sri Aurobindo's Savitri Book I, Canto III.

But he was, alas, a man dogged by destiny—the destiny of frustration. He blurted it out one day in deep melancholy in the revealing stillness of midnight when he said* that of late he had often felt like committing suicide. I gave an involuntary shudder. He appraised me with his deep eyes and smiled sadly. "But I have never been able to understand," he said, "why people are so afraid to make an exit out of this world when they can no longer feel the necessity of living. I am persuaded that those who have no faith in a Purpose piloting the world have forfeited their birthright to life. I confess to a sense of shame that I still cling to life simply because of an instinctive attachment to living. But when I see, as I do today, that I have no will to arrive, I feel like a coward who wants to live not because he can help others but because he gloats in his power to hamper those who can. And," he added, slowly, "I have felt this most powerfully when I first saw—you know whom."

I felt moved. "You mean—"

"Yes, Sri Aurobindo," he nodded. Then after a brief pause: "and the one man to whom I have bowed down in my life as my superior . . . and the only seer who has truly fortified my faith in a Divine Purpose working through life transforming it secretly like a leaven as it were, and bypassing those who will not change themselves." He shook his head ruefully and went on: "And yet my faith has not stood me in good stead and I refused to collaborate with the Author of this Purpose because He didn't acclaim me as his sole editor, because I was not entrusted by Him with the sole copyright of the series to come—in a word, because I was too self-willed to be a mere contributor of His Book of Life. I had no humility. That's why I had to fare like a high peak, where no seed can bear, despising the fertile low lands which," he gave me a quick look, "which Sri Aurobindo had wanted me to be."

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* I kept a record of his talks which I published later in a Bengali book of mine entitled, "Edeshe Odeshe" (In Different Climes). The words that fell from his lips which I have quoted here are translated from a chapter in this book.

"I felt for him a deep sympathy and admiration but I could not think of anything helpful to say. So I kept silent as he went on after a brief pause:

"Yes, I should have had the humility to accept the light he had won and could give others who really aspired to it. I should have enlisted under the banner of subservience. That is why I had to leave his mighty aura of the new creation where the rule of mind is going to be replaced by the Supermind, *le nouveau Dieu. Oui, c'est un nouveau Dieu qu'il faut adorer*—a new Divinity claims our allegiance, as I wrote once, since we have long outgrown the old. And Sri Aurobindo is the only man who has won through to this vision and, what is more, has got the power to translate it in life by ushering in a new era of the Supramental apocalypse . . . Yes," he added after a pause, "he and no one else has the key of the world to be, and my tragedy is that my love of self-will forced me to leave his aegis and choose the alternative of living a pointless life away from the *one* man whose society I rate over that of all the others put together. Do you wonder now why I should be constantly harping on suicide?"

I was moved to my depths. For what he had said brought out in a flash the greatness of the vision of Sri Aurobindo and into a bolder relief as it were against the abysmal despondency of one whose light of will had petered out because he had chosen to wed darkness instead. The last words he said on that last night were: "*Oui, pour moi Sri Aurobindo* c'est le Shiva incarné: (Yes, to me he is the incarnate Shiva) an Avatar among mortals."

This was the beginning of the end. I had come to Nice, I realised to my shame, to be away from my Guru's aura and I shuddered to think that it might—who knew?—lead me into the slough of despond that had claimed Paul Richard as its victim. I thought of returning but then wouldn't it look too sentimental? What would my people who thought the world of me infer? That I was a vacillating milksop, a lackadaisical day-dreamer, at best a well-meaning wayfarer whose one aim was to wander aimlessly through life, a happy parasite, who was a comfort to a handful of similar parasites here and there. It was borne home to me as never before that I had wilfully accepted the hectic life of ambition, of personal fame as against the one life that matters, the life of a humble servant of the Divine, the one aspiration of the great mystic Mirabai. I felt a pang that I who had heard the Call of the Flute should have thereafter stopped to hark back to lesser music—of fame and personal ambition. The oscillation frightened me, the climbing down hurt my self-respect and I prayed as never before. And my prayer was heard: my spirits revived forewarned by the wreck of a brilliant man whom so many had admired. And my heart glimpsed fugitively what I was to see more clearly by and by, and in especial through my spiritual crises, that although

> "An old pull of subconscious cords renewed
> Can draw the unwilling spirit from the heights,
> Or a dull gravitation drags us down
> To the blind driven inertia of our base"

nevertheless

> "This too the supreme Diplomat can use,
> He makes our fall a means for greater rise." *

I decided to return home, but not before an operation I had undergone so that my hernia might not stand in the way of my being accepted. Also I saw Russell in his Cornwall home; gave a few lectures here and there and booked a passage home in November, 1927.

But the strange thing was that I still wanted to put off leaving for Pondicherry. I pleaded with my Guru (mentally, I mean) not to tug too hard for yet a while, though by now I could see clearly that my sufferings were being prolonged unnecessarily only because I wanted to temporise. Still I could not help it—or shall I say would not?—till the tug at the other end became too powerful for my self-will.

And I went to Pondicherry for the second time in August, 1928. But I was not a little crestfallen to learn that Sri Aurobindo had in the meanwhile gone into seclusion and had made it a rule to see none except on three days in the year and even then he would not speak with them, they could only see him, make him their obeisance and then pass on in a file. But, I heard, the presiding deity of the Ashram—'the Mother,' as they called her—had accepted to guide, in consultation with Sri Aurobindo, all who came and I was told that she was a radiant personality adored of all the inmates of the Ashram and looked upon by the disciples as the equal of the great Yogi. So I sought an interview with her after the *darshan* day as it was called. She was exceedingly kind to me and listened to me with great sympathy. I was charmed by her personality at once effulgent and soothing. Her being was haloed with beauty, but it was not an earthly beauty. She was elusive yet so concrete, so real!

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* Quoted from Sri Aurobindo's poem Savitri, Book I, Canto III.

"At once she was the stillness and the word,
A continent of self-diffusing peace,
An ocean of untrembling virgin fire . . .
Her look, her smile awoke celestial sense
Even in her earth-stuff, and their intense delight
Poured a supernal beauty on men's lives." *

I accepted her at once as my Guru along with Sri Aurobindo and told her all about myself—my doubts, difficulties and conflicts. She gave me a patient hearing but made no comment. But as she had somehow emboldened me to hope, I asked, at a venture, whether she would accept me and give me initiation. She agreed and told me that Sri Aurobindo had told her that I was now fit for his Yoga. I felt overjoyed but told her, somewhat ruefully, that I had never yet had what is popularly termed "an experience" and that this made me doubt whether Yoga could be utterly convincing to a sceptic like myself. She only smiled and said she would try and told me to meditate in my room at nine in the evening when she would do the same in hers.

I was in joy yet I had a gnawing fear in my heart, I do not know why. But one thing I was determined to be: watchful; in other words, not to accept any experience that might come. I had little use for the credulity of the devout and had a rooted aversion to accept as *authentic* any experience which might be explained away as auto-suggestion. The thing must be as concrete and indubitable as sense-experience before I could possibly admit it as valid. (I was indeed a very foolish watchman in those days, not knowing then that mystic experience might be condemned on many counts but never on that of vagueness or insubstantiality.) I am at pains to stress this because what did come was so utterly unexpected as to rule out all auto-suggestion or wishful thinking. At all events, I was convinced that a Force was acting like a ferment within me which was too concrete to be dismissed.

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* Quoted from Sri Aurobindo's poem Savitri, Book I, Canto II.

The next day I surrendered to the Mother my will to be moulded by her and Sri Aurobindo. I was accepted and came finally to follow their lead three months later, on the 22nd November, to be more precise, dedicating all I had to what I have learned to love more and more as the holiest cause to which I could possibly consecrate my life. I have felt hesitant to bring so much of my personal conflicts in but I believe myself to be sincere when I claim that I have done this because I have felt that I could not have possibly painted Sri Aurobindo as I see him (with all my limitations) had I, prompted by the conventional brand of modesty, kept the appraiser's angle of vision and personality, such as it is, out of the picture. Overstressed modesty I deem even more harmful for a truth-seeker than the usual brand of self-importance because the latter has at least the merit of deceiving nobody whereas the former is out, alas, to impress, a good many without owning it even to oneself. Lastly, I believe that if the disciple's spirit of worship is genuine, then even his shortcomings will be exploited by the *Divine Diplomat* to heighten the perfection of His Representative: the Guru, the Avatar.

On February 4th, 1943

I entered his room, the sanctum from which he had never once stirred out since 1926, and made my obeisance. He blessed me.

"Feeling better?" he asked, his eyes soft with kindness.

"Yes," I answered with some difficulty. I was moved. He bent his starry eyes on me expectantly. But not a word came to my lips. This was unusual with me for I had come equipped with a quiverful of questions. He came to my help and broke the silence, to put me at my ease.

"You sent me some questions in writing this morning," he said. "Suppose we start with the first?"

I nodded and hung on his every word . . .

Let this much suffice by way of a foreword. I will only add that I recorded the talk I had with him the same afternoon and tried to recapture his words as he said them. In many places, however, I had to leave gaps as I wanted to be even more faithful than before and wanted him to fill these up rather than rely on my unaided memory. Fortunately for me he complied with my request with his usual patience as he appreciated my diffidence and carefully revised my report of his answers line by line.

My first question referred to was a somewhat long one; so I prefer not to put it on paper since it must emerge clearly enough from what follows.

"As to your first question," he said, "there are, broadly, two ways. One is that of Buddha who held, as you know, that although you may get some help or guidance from others, Guru or not, you will have to tread the Path alone, that is, hewing your way out of the wood with your own effort: in other words, the time-old path of *tapasya*. The other way is to take the Guru as a Representative of the Divine who knows the Way and therefore is in a position, obviously, to help others in finding it. That is the path followed by the aspirants here, in the Ashram—the path of Guruvad."

I nodded and said: "I know that. But I asked you in one of my questions: what should be one's attitude when one feels oneself held up by certain human limitations of the

Guru? I don't mean though," I hastened to add, "that the question concerns me vitally since I reckon myself fortunate in having *you* for my Guru. But I have friends who are less fortunate and so I thought it best to put the question to you face to face, if you know what I mean."

"You can be fairly sure I do," he smiled indulgently. "But I think I have gone into the question before and said that though something is determined by the power of the channel—that is to say, the Guru—much more is determined by that of the recipient, the disciple." He paused and gave me a half smile as he went on: "You see, the modern mind often makes a mental muddle in such questions for the simple reason that in the way of the Spirit the Force that works things out does not achieve its results on the lines laid down by mental reason. That is why it fails to appreciate this simple fact that once the disciple accepts the Guru as a Representative of the Divine, the Divine too accepts him through the Guru: put differently, when he opens to the Guru he opens to the Divine so that the Guru can, in spite of his 'human limitations' help him by the simple process of invoking a Force that acts through the Guru's personality—a Force which is *not* dwarfed by his human limitations. I wrote to you also once, I think, that the Guru's imperfections need be no stumbling block to a disciple who may contact the Divine through the Guru even before the Guru himself; so what matters, in the last analysis, is the Guru's *spiritual capacity* to get him the desired contact and not his *human limitations*—because these don't block the way. Do you follow?"

The next question was about certain occult phenomena like materialisation or levitation. I had had a discussion with a friend to whom he had said, when told of my scepticism, that these were by no means all trickery and humbug as contended by many dogmatic scientists.

Nevertheless I discovered that my mind was extremely unwilling to accept the authenticity of the evidence in support of such phenomena. This in its turn had made me feel a deep malaise because I knew that I ought not to question the Guru's superior experience and wisdom and yet here was I defending my right to my doubts! This by itself would not probably have mattered so much; but, in the present instance, the karma of my doubt entailed a chain of far-reaching consequences the most serious of which was, as I found to my bitter cost, that criticizing the Guru even in thought only buttressed one's ego. This I told him again, although I was not a little uneasy about the advisability of candour; so I was rehearsing in my mind how to apologise gracefully without being insincere when he anticipated me.

"But you needn't be alarmed," he put in placidly. "For Yoga has for its ultimate object the realisation of the Divine and achieving the Divine life. These are side-issues and as such need not be looked upon as germane to spiritual experience. So belief in them is not necessary, far less indispensable for realisation. You have the right of private judgment in matters such as these."

My heart-beat abated, and I said: "I am very much relieved. For I feared lest the inability to accept the Guru's view in every instance be looked upon by the Guru as a sure sign of one's unfitness to profit by the master's guidance."

"You may be reassured once more," he said kindly. "For you can take it from me that when I say or write anything it's only to state my findings or else explain my point of view. I don't insist on it as a law for others. And can you imagine, knowing me as you do all these years, that I should impose my outlook on others? * I have

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* About the function of the Guru Sri Aurobindo wrote in his Synthesis of Yoga: "But the wise Teacher will not seek to impose

never cared to be a dictator; neither do I insist that everybody's views must be moulded by mine, any more than I insist that everybody must follow me or my Yoga." He paused and pointed at a bronze image in front. "For instance," he added, "I find that image very beautiful. But if you disagree why should I mind?"

"It is contended by some," I hazarded, "that the Guru does it for the sake of unity—or harmony—or—"

He smiled once more. "But unity is not synonymous with uniformity, surely. The One becomes Many. So to accept the One you have to learn to accept the Multiple, the many-sidedness of the manifestation along with the unity of the Manifested. Do you follow?"

"I do," I answered brightening. "Unity in diversity, as you put it somewhere. But," I hastened to add: "I revere you so much that even to have to differ from you on a small matter causes me a pang. Sri Ramkrishna said that it is good to believe, and believe me, I *want* to believe like a believer. I would even risk asserting that I would love to believe whatever *you* say, so much so that if I found that bronze statue anything but beautiful I would hesitate to say so against your approval. This malaise in such and other cases—as for instance when you pronounced what you did about the occult phenomena—is so real that I almost take it as an index to my unfitness for Yoga—your Yoga. Naturally this loads me with a great deal of anxiety. Besides, I want on my own to be-

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himself or his opinions on the passive acceptance of the receptive mind; he will throw in only what is productive and sure as a seed which will grow under the divine fostering within. He will seek to awaken much more than to instruct. His work . . . is a trust from above, he himself a channel, a vessel or a representative. He is a man helping his brothers, a child leading children, a light kindling other lights, an awakened soul awakening souls, at highest a Power or Presence of the Divine calling to him other powers of the Divine."

lieve if only to get the better of my mental preconceptions. In a word, I want my mind to abdicate. But where is the new ruler whom I am to put on its throne—the new Light I mean which is to replace our Lordship, the Mental Glimmer?"

He gave me a long look, then said: "It would be easier for the mind to get the new light if it didn't insist as it does that its old Ruler, Reason, was fully capable of coping with the situation. For, boiled down, it comes to an insistence, really, that the mind was the ultimate judge of all experience. But spiritual experience has it that you can never hope to understand—get to the root of—anything by your mind alone. The mind by its very constitution is unable to apprehend more than a very small fraction of the Divine reality and its action. Of this action occult phenomena is an instance in point. You cannot understand the true nature of such phenomena with your mental probings and since this is a fact, it would be better if instead of dismissing them as fraud you could suspend your judgment till you became competent to judge. For this deeper judgment only comes through the dawn of a greater consciousness by whose light alone can you hope to understand Divine action behind its terrestrial or occult disguises."

"But—I mean—it's all right in theory," I still demurred, "but when one is actually confronted—for instance, take the case of Sri Bijoy Goswami who said that his Guru had spirited away his wife to a far-off place across the sky. Do you mean to say that it can be authentic or possible?"

"Whether what he claimed did happen in his wife's case is more than I can tell you," he answered. "But since levitation has been *seen* to be possible and can be verified by the Yogis and has been, I don't see how it can be dismissed out of hand as impossible. Thousands of experiences testify to phenomena which utterly baffle the mind. For when all is said and done, experience *is* and *must be* the last touchstone of reality and experience has it that levitation or materialisation is possible—"

"There," I interjected. "You have just anticipated me. For I was going to ask you precisely about materialisation. One hears of such occurrences but I have so far met none who has seen these with his own eyes. One must have reliable evidence you know—not merely hearsay—"

He smiled and said: "Let me tell you then what I have seen with my own eyes if only to obviate your objection about the hearsay evidence. And it was an occurrence witnessed to by at least half-a-dozen people besides, who were with me." * And he started in his incisive, lucid way to relate what had happened. As I wanted to be accurate about the details, I wrote to him next morning to supply me these. He kindly complied and here is his written account:

"I gave you this as an instance of actual occult law and practice, showing that these things are not imaginations or delusions or humbug, but can be true phenomena.

"The stone-throwing began unobtrusively with a few stones thrown at the guest-house kitchen—apparently from the terrace opposite, but there was no one there. The phenomenon began at the fall of dusk and continued at first for half-an-hour, but daily it increased in frequency, violence and the size of the stones, and the duration of the attack increased also, sometimes lasting for several hours until, towards the end, in the hour or half-hour before midnight, it became a regular bombardment; and now it was no longer at the kitchen only but thrown in other places as well: for example, the outer verandah. At first we took it for a human-made affair and sent for the police, but the investigation lasted only for a short time and when one of the constables in the verandah got a stone whizzing unaccountably between his two legs, the police abandoned the case in a panic. We made our own investigations, but the places whence the stones seemed to be or might be coming were void of human stone-throwers. Finally, as if to put us kindly out of doubt, the stones began falling inside closed rooms; one of these—it was a huge one and I saw it immediately after it fell—reposed flat and comfortable on a cane table as if that was its proper resting-place. And so it went on till the missiles became murderous. Hitherto the stones had been harmless except for a daily battering of Bijoy's door—during the last days—which I watched the night before the end. They appeared in mid-air, a few feet above the ground, not coming from a distance but suddenly manifesting and, from the direction from which they flew, should have been thrown close in from the compound of the guest-house or the verandah itself, but the whole place was in clear light and I saw that there was no human being there nor could have been. At last the semi-idiot boy servant who was the centre of the attack and was sheltered in Bijoy's room under his protection, began to be severely hit and was bleeding from a wound by stones materialising inside the closed room. I went in at Bijoy's call and saw the last stone fall on the boy: Bijoy and he were sitting side by side and the stone was thrown at them in front but there was no one visible to throw it—the two were alone in the room. So unless it was Wells' Invisible Man—!

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* e.g. Barindra Kumar Ghosh, Upendra Nath Banerji, Nalini Kanto Gupta, Suresh Chandra Chakravarti, Hrishikesh Kanjilal, Bijoy Nag, Amrita and others. All except the last two are eminent intellectuals and the first four writers and thinkers of standing in Bengal.

"So far we had only been watching or scouting around, but this was a little too much, it was becoming dangerous and something had to be done about it. The Mother, from her knowledge of the process of these things, decided that the process here must depend on a nexus between the boy servant and the house, so if the nexus were broken and the servant separated from the house, the stone-throwing would cease. We sent him away to Hrishikesh's place and immediately the whole phenomenon ceased; not a single stone was thrown after that and peace reigned.

"That showed," Sri Aurobindo wrote in conclusion, "that these occult phenomena are real, have a law or process as definite as that of any scientific operation and that the knowledge of the processes can not only bring them about but put an end to or annul them."

(I must pause here to be able to explain the episode for the general reader. I was told afterwards by Amrita, who had been an eye-witness of the whole drama, that all this had happened in mid-winter in 1921 day after day. And fortunately, he had kept a record of the whole incident which he showed me. From this I gathered that a cook called Vattal was the author of the mischief. Infuriated for having been dismissed, the fellow had threatened that he would make the place too hot for those who remained. And he went for help to a Mussalman Faqir who was versed in black magic, and then it all began. I asked Amrita whether the stones could have been illusory. He smiled and said that he had had them collected and kept them as exhibits for months and that they had a very curious feature in that they were all covered with moss. I was also told that among those who were then on the spot there was the rationalist stalwart Upendra Nath Banerji who had at first pooh-poohed the black-magic story and girded up his loins to unearth the miscreants who were responsible for it all. But even he had to confess himself beaten in the end as he could not make any sense out of the strange episode. But it all transpired when Vattal's wife came in an extremity of despair and threw herself at the mercy of Sri Aurobindo and the

Mother. Her husband had realised that the nemesis had overtaken him for he knew occultism enough to realise that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had hurled the force back. When such occult forces are aroused against one who can repel them they inevitably recoil back upon the head of its original author. So her husband had fallen desperately sick. Sri Aurobindo in his generosity forgave the fellow and said in Amrita's presence: "For this he need not die." The black magician recovered after that.)

"So you see," he said, at the end of his narration, "the Mother who had studied occultism in North Africa could understand it all because of her deep occult knowledge."

"And you?"

He smiled but deliberated for a split second before he answered: "I too have had hundreds of personal experiences about occult forces."

"What about the question of levitation?"

"I take levitation as an acceptable idea, because I have had experience of the natural energies which, if developed, would bring it about and also physical experiences which would not have been possible if the principle of levitation were untrue." *

"But why is it then," I asked after a slight pause, "that the modern mind is so definitely against accepting such experiences as valid?"

"I have answered that question in my various writings," he answered, "and have said there that the mind is an instrument of Ignorance growing towards knowledge. 'This does not mean that mind has no place at all in the spiritual life; but it does mean that it cannot be even the main instrument much less the authority to whose judgment all must submit themselves including the Divine.

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* This sentence he wrote in his own hand in correcting my report. I pressed for some more details about his personal experience in this matter, but he evaded it humourously by saying that these were not "at present tellable."

Mind must learn from the greater consciousness it is approaching and not impose its own standards on it.'* This is difficult for the mind to achieve because the mind, by its very nature, can only see clearly one thing at a time, because it can achieve concentration only on parts of existence and thus fulfil its function which is to seek unity by reducing all ruthlessly to the terms of one. This process has a great practical utility in that it has given the human mind the initial training it needed and thus helped it to keep before itself 'the idea of something beyond and ultimate towards which it must turn. But when all is said, the intellectual Reason can only point vaguely or feel gropingly towards it or try to indicate partial aspects of its manifestation here; it cannot enter into or know it.'† But as you are vowed to a more comprehensive seeking, why should you let yourself be hedged in in your *a priori* mental conceptions of what is possible and what is not? The popular notion that you can judge what is beyond the ordinary consciousness when you are still in the ordinary consciousness is untenable. So the best way is to make your mind as passive as you can and open to the Truth delivered from these preconceptions. The thing is to grow in consciousness as to be able to realise the higher truths. If you can do that and let your psychic being take the lead, it will, in due time, lead you to the opening you seek where the mind with its half-lit consciousness will no longer circumscribe your vision because a higher Light, descending from above," he pointed at a region above his head, "will then take its place and knowledge will pour in from the higher reaches of the mind up to Overmind and Supermind. That is my Yoga, as you know."

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* Quoted from a letter written to me.

† From a letter written to my friend, Chadwick. Lastly, he wrote to me in a letter: "You must get rid of an exaggerated insistence on the use of reason and the correctness of your individual reasoning and its right to decide on all matters. The reason has its place especially with regard to certain physical things and general worldly questions—though even there it is a very fallible judge—or in the formation of metaphysical conclusions and generalisations; but its claim to be the decisive authority in matters of Yoga or in spiritual things is untenable. . . It has always been understood in India that the reason and its logic or its judgment cannot give you the realisation of spiritual truths but can only assist in an intellectual presentation of ideas; realisation comes by intuition and inner experience. Reason and intellectuality cannot make you see the Divine: it is the soul that sees. Mind and the other instruments can only share in the vision when it is imparted to them by the soul and welcome and rejoice in it. But also the mind may prevent it or at least stand long in the way of the realisation of the vision. For its prepossessions, preconceived opinions and mental preferences may build a wall of arguments against the spiritual truth that has to be realised and refuse to accept it if it presents itself in a form which does not conform to its own previous ideas: so also it may prevent one from recognising the Divine if the Divine presents Himself in a form for which the intellect is not prepared or which in any detail runs counter to its prejudgments and prejudices. One can depend on one's reason in other

I nodded without enthusiasm. "I know," I answered, "and I see, too, that 'mental passivity' is likely to be helpful if one can but achieve it. But my difficulty is that my mind is too refractory to abdicate obligingly. And then," I hesitated for a split second and added: "the difficulty is by no means lessened when I catch myself wondering . . . whether mental questioning too may not have some use . . . serving some purpose! At such moments I would ask myself if . . . if even our doubts too might not be helpful through the very suffering they entailed. I am often reminded of A.E.'s moving lines in his beautiful poem, Man to the Angel:

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matters provided the mind tries to be open and impartial and free from undue passion and it is prepared to concede that it is not always right and may err; but it is not safe to depend on it alone in matters which escape its jurisdiction, especially in spiritual realisation and in matters of Yoga which belongs to a different order of knowledge."

> "They are but the slaves of light
> Who have never known the gloom
> And between the dark and bright
> Willed in freedom their own doom."

The next day I wrote to him confessing my inability to recapture what he had answered apropos and went on to explain what had been at the back of my mind. In conclusion I asked him if he would be so kind as to write from memory what he had said hereanent reminding him about what he had written in his Life Divine with regard to "grief, pain, suffering, error" etc., recognising these as "facts of world-consciousness, not fictions and unrealities, although they are facts whose complete sense or true value is not that which we assign to them in our ignorance. . . . For," he had written, "without experience of pain we would not get all the infinite value of the divine delight of which pain is in travail; all ignorance is a penumbra which environs an orb of knowledge, every error is significant of the possibility and the effort of a discovery of truth; every weakness and failure is a first sounding of gulfs of power and potentiality; all division is intended to enrich by an experience of various sweetness of unification the joy of realised unity." *

He wrote back: "I do not remember saying anything on this subject except that disappointed vital desire must bring about suffering. Pain and suffering are necessary results of the Ignorance in which we live; men grow by all kinds of experience, pain and suffering as well as their opposites, joy and happiness and ecstasy. One can get strength from them if one meets them in the right way. Many take a joy in pain and suffering when associated

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* Chapter, The Divine and the Undivine, Vol. II, p. 170.
Also he wrote in his poem Savitri:
"None can reach heaven who has not passed through hell."

with struggle or endeavour of adventure, but that is more because of the exhilaration and excitement of the struggle than because of suffering for its own sake. There is, however, something in the vital which takes joy in the whole of life, its dark as well as its bright sides. There is also something perverse in the vital which takes a kind of dramatic pleasure in its own misery and tragedy, even in degradation or in illness. As for doubts, I don't think mere doubts can bring any gain; mental questioning can bring gains if it is in pursuit of truth, but questioning just for the sake of sceptical questioning or in a pure spirit of contradiction can only bring, when it is directed against the truths of the spirit, either error or a lasting incertitude. If I am always questioning the Light when it comes and refusing its offer of truth, the Light cannot stay in me, cannot settle; eventually finding no welcome and no foundation in the mind, it will retire. One must push forward into the Light and not be always falling back into the darkness and hugging the darkness in the delusion that it is the real light. Whatever fulfilment one may feel in pain and misery and doubt belongs to Ignorance: the real fulfilment is in the Divine joy and the Divine truth and its certitude and it is that for which the Yogin strives. In the struggle he may have to pass through doubt, not by his own choice or will but because there is still imperfection in his knowledge."

The next question I asked was whether mental evolution might not on occasion hinder the psychic evolution.

"It may and very often does," he answered, "especially if the attitude is wrong; that is, if the mind presumes that it is the last term of our personality. The reason I have told you before. It is that the higher Light which comes to expedite the evolution invites our co-operation. Consequently if the pride of the mind and vital in the surface mental ideas declines to make room for it it cannot effect an entry. That is why I have told you more than once, I think, that in the realm of the Spirit it is only when one knows that one is ignorant that one really begins to know. For so long as one is unwilling to go beyond the mind one is unlikely to have any but the vaguest ideas of the higher functions of the consciousness. For instance, men who live and are content to live in the mental regard themselves generally as physical beings or beings of life or mental beings without feeling any urge to posit a soul. For they don't feel it except perhaps in the hope that it is something which survives the dissolution of the body. But beyond this they are not prepared to go for the simple reason that they have not experienced the soul as distinct from the mind. So these," he added, "identify themselves with their mental beings and assert that the soul is a fiction because they don't feel they have any souls. And this happens so long as the psychic being remains still veiled—behind."

I felt a strange elation and said: "That I know of course. For you have stressed this again and again in your letters to me not to mention your Life Divine where you have said so beautifully about its working from behind a veil as it were in a deeper part of our nature so long as our personality has not attained to a certain evolution."

(This I quote in full as it is very illuminating:*

"The soul in us, the psychic principle . . . puts forward and develops a soul personality, a distinct psychic being to represent it. This psychic being remains still behind the veil in our subliminal part, like the true mental, the true vital or the true subtle physical being within us: but, like them, it acts on the surface life by the influences and intimations it throws up upon that surface; these form part of the surface aggregate which is the conglomerate effect of the inner influences and upsurgings, the visible formation and superstructure which we ordinarily experience and think of as ourselves. On this ignorant surface we become dimly aware of something that can be called a soul as distinct from mind, life or body; we feel it not only as our mental idea or vague instinct of ourselves, but as a sensible influence in our life and character and action. A certain sensitive feeling for all that is true and good and beautiful, fine and pure and noble, a response to it, a demand for it, a pressure on mind and life to accept and formulate it in our thought, feelings, conduct, character is the most usually recognised, the most general and characteristic, though not the sole sign of the influence of the psyche. Of the man who has not this element in him or does not respond at all to this urge, we say that he has no soul. For it is this influence that we can most easily recognise as a finer or even a diviner part in us and the most powerful for the slow turning towards some aim at perfection in our nature.")

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* Chapter on Triple Transformation, Vol. II. pp. 914-5.

He nodded and said: "And till we do—that is to say, so long as we do not attain to this natural development—the psychic being has to wait assisting the development of the personality till it has fully assimilated all the experience that the soul derives through its instruments, namely, mind, life and body. But the mind can be a great help if during this incubating period it consents to remain plastic—that is, an instrument of the soul and not its dictator; in other words, if it does not presume to be a judge of soul-truths from its lesser tribunal of mental conceptions, do you understand?"

I nodded somewhat sadly and answered: "But it is one thing to understand but quite another to do the bidding of the understanding. What I mean is that though I see the wisdom of getting the mind to help, yet I find it enormously difficult to achieve the plasticity you advocate. So why not give me some practical hints as to how I am to set about it?"

"But I *have* given—again and again," he laughed.

"Didn't I advise you in so many of my letters to get into contact with your inner being, to try to live within, to take the help of your poetry and music, for instance, because these promote your devotion—*bhakti*—and help you take up the right attitude. I have told you—and you have known this too—how much easier it becomes to tread the psychic path, the sunlit path, when one's attitude is right, since it becomes then ever so much easier for the psychic being to come to the front. And I have told you also, so many times, that the more your psychic being comes to the fore, the less difficult will become the task of transformation of the human nature into its divine absolute. That is why I have always enjoined on you to follow this path—the path of devotion, service and works—since it is easier for your nature to follow this path than any other."

"I follow all that intellectually, you may be sure," I answered ruefully. "Only—well, I find this path anything but easy, as I too have told you again and again. My mental and vital self-will simply keeps butting in and spoiling all and there I find myself in a quandary taking always the wrong view of things."

"On the contrary, I should think," he countered, "I have always seen that whenever you are in a psychic condition with *bhakti* or the higher part of the vital uppermost in you, you take almost automatically the right view of things. For then I see your sight of mind emerging and your judgments becoming remarkably clear, right and often luminous."

"How do you mean? You really mean to say I take the right view of things?"

"I don't mean you achieve this successfully all along the line—in every point. I only stressed that you react thus, in a general way, whenever you are in a natural state of *bhakti* and the psychic influence on your mind and vital is active. In your poems and songs it becomes very active; that is why I have always encouraged them so much."

"You have," I acquiesced, heartened. "For I remember you wrote to me some time back that when I write poetry, my psychic being is always behind it and that even when I am in the depths of despondency as soon as I start writing my psychic being intervenes and throws its self-expression in. I am very grateful and glad for it all of course, but—"

"Go on."

"Well, what I mean is—it doesn't solve the problem."

"And what is the problem?" he smiled.

"Well," I groped vainly for words. "The thing is—I mean I simply can't retain the—the psychic attitude. Why can't I?"

"I can answer that. It's because your vital gets restless through impatience and then your mental starts fidgeting and questioning—didn't I tell you all that before?"

"You did. But—well, how to apply the remedy? Why don't you see that I get no peace? If I did, how easy it would have been for me to—to have the psychic attitude, if you see what I mean."

"I see that clearly enough," he laughed, amused. "Only why don't *you* see that if you let your psychic abdicate in favour of the vital you can't expect to win peace since the vital by itself can never woo peace. Peace is not in its nature."

"Yes, I remember a letter you wrote to me in which you said that the vital was a good servant but a bad master."

"And the reason also I told you. It is that Yoga brings to bear a pressure on those parts of our nature where crudities and impurities are firmly entrenched. To the vital this is painful, first, because it is obscure and does not understand and, secondly, because there are parts of it that want to be left to their crude dark movements and therefore shy at Light because they don't want to change."

"What about the mind?" I asked somewhat chastened. "Can it get peace?"

"Of a sort," he said dubitatively, "but usually it is no more than a neutral kind of peace—through a quietened mind. But even that peace owns as its origin the psychic behind. For true peace belongs essentially to the psychic: happy confidence, ready understanding and spontaneous surrender are as native to it as trust is to love. So you can't get away from the psychic even if you want peace. That is why I have told you again and again never to yield to vital despair through impatience, for that hampers the work of the psychic. You must learn to be patient and trust to this work of the psychic if you want to be lifted out of your 'quandary,' you understand?"

"But what about the way of knowledge to quieten the mind?"

"Well, there are several approved techniques—for those, I mean who are called to tread the path. The one Vivekananda followed, for instance. You know that process, don't you?"

"I have read about it in his Rajayoga."

(Here is what the great Vedantin wrote: "The first lesson, then is to sit for some time and let the mind run on. The mind is bubbling up all the time. It is like a monkey jumping about. Let the monkey jump as much as he can; you simply wait and watch . . . Until you know what the mind is doing you can't control it. Give it rein . . . You will find that each day it is becoming calmer . . . until at last the mind will be under perfect control . . . It is a tremendous work, not to be done in a day. Only after a patient continual struggle for years can we succeed.")

"Well, that is one way of achieving mastery over your thoughts," Sri Aurobindo said after explaining the process. "There are others. Lele, for instance, showed me one. 'Make your mind quiet,' he told me, 'don't think actively. Then you will see that the thoughts you believe to be yours come from outside; throw them away as they come and your mind will fall silent.' I had never heard of such a thing before. But I did not question the possibility nor doubt the truth of it. I accepted what he told me and made my mind inactive, only watching what thoughts were coming and whence. Then I saw a wonderful thing: the mind as a whole silent and single thoughts coming, indeed, from outside! And I threw these away before they could enter the aura of my mind. Thus in three days I was free from all thoughts and my mental became universal and liberated, and I became the master of the incoming thoughts and no longer their puppet, since I could choose the ones I would and reject the rest."

"I remember that," I answered, "for you wrote about it to me more than once and I remember too how you startled me and how I admired your power to accept such an outlandish proposition at once just because your teacher said it!"

"It is not easy," he conceded as a smile hovered round his lips. "I know that."

I knew too who was the target of his mild irony. So I changed the topic.

"Tell me," I said, "shall I have a try at this process of domesticating my mind?"

No sooner had I blurted it out than I dreaded lest he reply in the affirmative.

He must have read my mind, for he burst out laughing as he answered:* "But mind you, you mustn't try as did one Iyer here." He paused again and laughed, then went on: "It was so comic, you know! He asked me how he might still the mind. I told him. He followed my direction and, by a rare stroke of fortune, succeeded. But fancy him rushing to me, scared to death! 'Oh, my brain is empty of thoughts, I cannot think! Good God! I am becoming an idiot!' Little did he realise," he laughed once more, "that one could not very well *become* what one already was. Anyhow I was not patient in those days and dropped him and let him lose his miraculously-achieved silence."

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* I had written in my report: "He laughed till his body shook; it was rollicking etc." Sri Aurobindo deleted the description and wrote on the margin: "This won't do. It is a too exhilarating over-description. It calls up to my mind a Falstaff or a Chesterton; it does not fit in my style of hilarity. It is long since my laughter has been con-

I joined in his beautiful happy laughter.

"But in your case," he resumed when our laughter had subsided, "you would be better advised to follow the psychic way, as I told you before."

"But I do try," I returned, "through my music and poetry as you put it specifically, and you know very well too how hard I *have* worked on those lines. But the difficulty is—and it is a growing one, I fear—that these activities satisfy me no longer, as I wrote to you so many times in the past. For do what I will, I simply can't get rid of a feeling that such activities are—how shall I put it—well, pointless, in the last analysis, like games you don't enjoy and yet have to pretend you do."

"I know," he answered after a thoughtful pause, "it is the old trend of *vairagya* which has taken root somewhere in your nature." He paused and looked at me fixedly as he added: "Personally, I do not care for *vairagya* as you know.* I have always preferred the way of *samata*

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tinuous and uncontrolled like that. For that to be true I shall have to wait till the Year 1, S.D. (Suprămental Descent). And 'rollicking'? The epithet would have applied to my grandfather but not to his less explosive grandson."

* "It is evident," he wrote to me once referring to my *vairagya* (distaste for things mundane) "that something in you, continuing the unfinished curve of a past life, is pushing you on this *vairagya*. . . . something that is determined to be drastic with the outer nature

—equality—of the Gita, in which one is not attached to or bound by anything."

"I know. But my danger doesn't lie in the direction of getting attached or bound. For I can no longer take the interest in my poetry or music which I once did, though it is strange that whenever I sit down, poems and songs and tunes come—almost spontaneously."

"That's the psychic being coming to the front through your verse or music as the case may be."

"I know," I said ruefully. "Only the trouble is that one can't go on just writing poems or composing music till doomsday—especially when the Divine seems too far to be taken seriously. And yet," I added, "the curious and somewhat embarrassing part of it is that others seem to feel that I am a radiant crystal of joy and faith and strength even when I am, in dull earnest, just sad and weak and lonely. How is that?"

"That's simple enough," he said. "They only come in contact with your inner being in which these are sparkling all right. It is the outer being which causes the division and blurs your own vision of the nucleus."

(When he said this I was reminded of a curious experience in 1936. I was depressed, a prey to doubts and self-pity and strolled along the pier at dusk when I met Maharani, a friend of mine. She was a disciple of the famous mystic, Pagal Haranath. We sat down on the pier and discussed the place of faith in Yoga. While talking I

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so as to make itself free to fulfil its secret aspiration. But do not listen to these suggestions of the voice that says: 'You shall not succeed and it is no use trying.' That is a thing that need never be said in the way of the Spirit, however difficult it may seem at the moment to be. Keep through all the aspiration you express so beautifully in your poems, for it is certainly there and comes out from the depths: and if it is the cause of suffering—as great aspirations are in a world and nature where there is so much to oppose them—it is also the promise and surety of emergence and victory in the future." (dated January 21, 1936.)

suddenly warmed up and spoke almost eloquently on Sri Aurobindo's view about faith, that it was like the light that suffused the sky before the sunrise to be etc. I felt a thrill as she hung on my words and lo, not a vestige of doubt was traceable anywhere within miles of me. But what was more remarkable still was that her eyes actually glistened in the light of the setting sun and we had a very warm inner contact. But, to crown my discomfiture as it were, as I strolled back home I was overtaken by horror: was I play-acting to impress her because she was a Queen? I felt humiliated in my own eyes although while I talked I was not conscious of any hypocrisy. I wrote to Sri Aurobindo about my bitter remorse for having been pretentious plus insincere.

He wrote back reassuringly—probably with a half-smile: "Your experience with the Maharani. That happens to everybody: It is that part of the consciousness comes up which not only believes these things but knows them to be true: the other part which is depressed and open to doubt and denial takes then a back seat or goes under-ground. People do not know this multitudinousness in human personality, so they call it insincerity in themselves or in others. But it is nothing of the kind. There are certain beliefs and feelings which something in our nature holds on to with a firm grip and storms and despondencies only cover but cannot destroy them."

As this incident flashed through me I understood what he had meant by others contacting in me what I missed so often in my own self: my inner being which he was bringing out with the light of his consciousness, my psychic being which he was pushing to the forefront by the power of his Grace. And I suddenly felt humble sitting at his feet—grateful indeed but a trifle ashamed as well. How could I have possibly doubted the depth of his wisdom or the correctness of his verdict about mystic truths? Also, had he not "awakened more than he had instructed"—to quote his own description of the function of the true Guru? And it was brought home to me as never before how much I had imbibed from his patient answers to my questionings—perhaps not unlike a child who often draws nourishment unconsciously from what it stares at with wide-eyed wonder!)

He seemed to read my thoughts. For he said: "Such things do happen in the spiritual field—things which the mind finds difficult to conceive. I will give you an instance. It is a fact of spiritual experience that the Guru may even be less than the disciple and yet able to help; he may even be instrumental in imparting to his disciple what he never himself realised."

"I am afraid—"

"Listen. Lele wanted me to have certain experiences but it so happened that I got something quite different—the experience of Nirvan which he hadn't bargained for at all. In fact he could not even comprehend it and so left me asking me to trust to my inner guide. But he did help me though not in the way his mind had wanted to."

I nodded half-heartedly.

He smiled at my helplessness and said: "Let me give you another instance then. Mother and I have been putting our Force on you—as on many another for that matter—and many things have happened as a result of its working. You didn't see the working but you had to admit yourself, on so many occasions, about things happening to you which you could only call miracles. Now, if you could have traced the Force working within you would have *seen* the whole process; but since you didn't, you called it a miracle and then went on doubting wisely whether it was really our Force that was responsible for the miracle!"

"Well," I apologised a little abashed, "I didn't exactly doubt your word, only I wondered—how shall I put it—I mean I asked myself whether it was a concrete Force you had meant when you spoke about it."

"Concrete? What do you mean by 'concrete'? Spiritual Force has its own concreteness. It can take a form—like a stream for instance—of which one is aware and can send it quite concretely on whatever object one chooses. This is a statement of fact about the power inherent in spiritual consciousness. But there is also such a thing as a willed use of any subtle force—it may be spiritual, mental or vital—to secure a particular result at some point in the world. Just as there are waves of unseen physical forces (cosmic waves etc.) or currents of electricity, so there are mind-waves, thought-currents, waves of emotion—for example, anger, sorrow etc.—which go out and affect others without their knowing whence they come or that they come at all, they only feel the result. One who has the occult or the inner senses awake can feel them coming and invading him. Influences good or bad may propagate themselves in that way; that can happen without intention and naturally, but also a deliberate use can be made of them. There can also be a purposeful generation of force, spiritual or other. There can be too the use of the effective will or idea acting directly without the aid of any outward action, speech or other instrumentation which is not concrete in that sense, but is all the same effective. These things are not imaginations or delusions or humbug, but true phenomena." *

As he warmed up his face looked more radiant than ever and I felt a thrill coursing through my spine. And, in a moment, I caught the contagion of his power and felt as though I had been transformed into a being of certitude! The darkness of doubt now seemed, suddenly, so alien! But above all that wonder and exaltation, above

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* This whole paragraph was written by Sri Aurobindo himself at my request.

the incredible intoxication of drinking in his words face to face there was a feeling of awe that such an incarnation of power and wisdom should be talking to me face to face as a *friend!* But I felt no pride, only a deep humility, which is shy to the point of declining an invitation, that such a being made of the stuff of Light and Love should have given me the right to laugh with him, to exchange views—even to break a lance with him as a comrade might! Of course there could be no question of expressing to him then and there what I felt, nor was it called for either. A lull intervened and I wondered what was coming next. But he said nothing. I met his eyes and then looked away. Still he did not speak. I then made a strange move which I can't explain. I blurted out a point-blank question apropos of nothing at all. I darted a glance at him and said: "When are you going to come out?"

He smiled and answered: "I don't know."

"How do you mean? Surely you must be knowing?"

He laughed. "Not in the way *you* know," he said looking intently at me. He paused for a split second, then added, tantalisingly: "For I stand no longer on the mental plane. I do not decide from the mind."

"But still," I insisted, "you can't really mean to say that a radiant personality like you will be cooped up in this small room till the—the end of time?"

"But I told you things are not predetermined with me," he said in an unruffled voice. "Suffice it to say for the present that I can't do what I *have* to do if I go on seeing people etc."

(I understood and so pressed him no more to be more explicit. For I remembered what he wrote in a recent letter—dated 30-5-42—explaining why he had decided to reply no more even to letters of his disciples:

"I had to establish the rule not out of personal preference or likes and dislikes, but because the correspondence occupied the greater part of my time and energies and there was a danger of my real work remaining neglected or undone if I did not change my course and devote myself to it. Now in these times of world-crisis when I have to be on guard and concentrated all the time . . . and when, besides, the major movement of the inner spiritual work needs an equal concentration and persistence, it is not possible for me to abandon the rule. Moreover, even for the individual *sadhak* it is in his interest that this major spiritual work should be done, for its success would create conditions under which his difficulties could be much more easily overcome.") He wrote to me a year later:

"Certainly my force is not limited to the Ashram and its conditions. As you know it is being largely used for helping the right development of the War and of the change in the human world. It is also used for individual purpose outside the scope of the Ashram and the practice of Yoga; but that of course is silently done and mainly by spiritual action. The Ashram, however, remains at the centre of the work and without the practice of Yoga the work would not exist and could not have meaning or fruition.")

"I have explained to you partly, in my recent letters, what I am busy with," he added after a slight pause. "But you can well imagine there are many other kinds of resistance I have to overcome."

"Tell me at least one thing," I said. "You wrote to me once of the resistance of the earth-nature. Mother also told me sometime back that upheavals and cataclysms are often an indication that a new descent or manifestation is near at hand. Did I understand her right?"

He nodded. "Those who had occult knowledge have said so with one voice down the ages."

"But I happen to be more interested in your personal views, or experience if you will."

(He wrote to me later—in April 1947—about these world conditions: "All that, however acute, is a temporary phenomenon for which those who know anything about the workings of the world-energy and the Spirit were prepared. I myself foresaw that this worst would come, the darkness of night before the dawn; therefore I am not discouraged. I know what is preparing behind the darkness and can see and feel the first signs of its coming. Those who seek for the Divine have to stand firm and persist in their seeking, after a time the darkness will disappear and the Light will come."

In another letter—20-10-46—he wrote to me: "But I have not been discouraged by what is happening, because I know and have experienced hundreds of times that beyond the blackest darkness there lies for one who is a divine instrument the light of God's victory."

He did not answer. "Have you any direct evidence in favour of such a prognosis?" I asked again.

A half smile edged his lips. He held my eyes for a few seconds without replying, then said: "I have."

"Do I understand that your Supramental means business after all—I mean by coming down at long last for us humans?"

His smile now broadened into laughter. "Yes," he parried, "only tell them when you meet them that the business is not theirs."

"Tell? Whom?"

He laughed again. "Well, the humans you were speaking of. Or rather those humans *who take for the Supramental something constructed by their own minds. These will be much disappointed if It came down but didn't fulfil their preconceived notions and ideas.*"

I laughed. "But are there such aspirants?"

"Aren't there?" he smiled. "Haven't you yourself *met some who tried to pull it down themselves and be the* *first Supramental beings—with disastrous results?"* He laughed again and added: *"People ought not to meddle with the Supramental at all in their present stage, but do what has to be done in the place where they are and leave the Supramental to me as my business."* *

(I was reminded of another joke of his about the Supramental Descent looking suspiciously like the eternal promise of a Second Front on the Continent, which everybody believed except the Russians.

"Do I understand," I pursued again after the laughter had subsided, "that the conquest of the Asuric forces will usher in the Supramental Descent?"

"Not in itself," he said with a far-away look, "but it will create conditions for the Descent to become a possibility."

There was something in his tone and look which stirred a chord deep down in me. I hesitated for a little and then hazarded the question, just to have the answer from his lips, was it? I do not know. All I know is that something irresistible impelled me to it.

"Is your real work this invocation of the Supramental?"

"Yes," he replied, very simply. "I have come for that."

And I was laughing with him, arguing with him, examining his point of view . . . because he had given me the right by calling me "a friend and a son," in his infinite compassion! The remorse of Arjuna in the Gita recurred to me, inevitably

> Oft I addressed thee as a human mate
> And laughed with thee—failing to apprehend
> Thine infinite greatness, sharing with thee my seat
> Or couch—by right of love for thee as a friend:
> For all such errors of irreverence
> Thy forgiveness I implore in penitence.

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* The words in italic he wrote in correcting my report.

Before taking his leave I made him my obeisance and asked him to recite to me from his great poem Ahana in quantitative dactyl, where the Goddess of Dawn replies to humans who aspired after her lore of Light. He readily complied and read out in his beautifully inflected voice:

Voice of the sensuous mortal, heart of eternal longing,
Thou who hast lived as in walls, thy soul with thy senses wronging!
But I descend at last. Fickle and terrible, sweet and deceiving,
Poison and nectar one has dispensed to thee, luring thee, leaving.
We two together shall capture the flute and the player relentless.
Son of man, thou hast crowned thy life with the flowers that are scentless,
Chased the delights that wound. But I come and midnight shall sunder.
Lo, I come, and behind me Knowledge descends and with thunder
Filling the spaces Strength, the Angel, bears on his bosom
Joy to thy arms. Thou shalt look on her face like a child's or a blossom,
Innocent, free as in Eden of old, not afraid of her playing,
When thy desires I have seized and devoured like a lioness preying.
Thou shalt not suffer always nor cry to me lured and forsaken:
I have a snare for his footsteps, I have a chain for him taken.
Come then to Brindavan, soul of the joyous; faster and faster
Follow the dance I shall teach thee with Shyama for slave and for master.
Follow the notes of the flute with a soul aware and exulting;
Trample Delight that submits and crouch to a sweetness insulting.
Then shalt thou know what the dance meant, fathom the song and the singer,
Hear behind thunder its rhymes, touched by lightning thrill to his finger,
Brindavan's rustle shalt understand and Yamuna's laughter,
Take thy place in the Ras* and thy share of the ecstasy after.

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* Ras—the dance-round of Krishna with the cowherdesses in the moonlit groves of Brindavan, type of the dance of Divine Delight with the souls of men liberated in the world of Bliss secret within us.

APPENDIX

[*For the benefit of Western readers I append here a brief statement of the principal facts of Sri Aurobindo's public and merely outward life from an authoritative source.*]

"Sri Aurobindo was born in Calcutta on August 15, 1872. In 1879, at the age of seven, he was taken with his two elder brothers to England for education and lived there for fourteen years. Brought up at first in an English family at Manchester, he joined St. Paul's School in London in 1885 and in 1890 went from it with a senior classical scholarship to King's College, Cambridge, where he studied for two years. In 1890 he passed also the open competition for the Indian Civil Service, but at the end of two years of probation failed to present himself at the riding examination and was disqualified for the Service. At this time the Gaekwar of Baroda was in London. Aurobindo saw him, obtained an appointment in the Baroda Service and left England in February, 1893.

"Sri Aurobindo passed thirteen years, from 1893 to 1906, in the Baroda service, first in the Revenue Department and in secretarial work for the Maharaja, afterwards as Professor of English and, finally, Vice-Principal in the Baroda College. These were years of self-culture, of literary activity—for much of the poetry afterwards published from Pondicherry was written at this time—and of preparation for his future work. In England he had received, according to his father's express instructions, an entirely occidental education without any contact with the culture of India and the East.* At Baroda he made up the deficiency, learned Sanskrit and several modern Indian languages, assimilated the spirit of Indian civilisation and its forms past and present. A great part of the last years of this period was spent on leave in silent political activity, for he was debarred from public action by his position at Baroda. The outbreak of the agitation against the partition of Bengal in 1905 gave him the opportunity to give up the Baroda service and join openly in the political movement. He left Baroda in 1906 and went to Calcutta as Principal of the newly-founded Bengal National College.

"The political action of Sri Aurobindo covered eight years, from 1902 to 1910. During the first half of this period he worked behind the scenes, preparing with other co-workers the beginnings of the Swadeshi (Indian Sinn Fein) movement, till the agitation in Bengal furnished an opening for the initiation of a more forward and direct political action than the moderate reformism which had till then been the creed of the Indian National Congress. In 1906 Sri Aurobindo came to Bengal with this purpose and joined the New Party, an advanced section small in numbers and not yet strong in influence, which had been recently formed in the Congress. The political theory of this party was a rather vague gospel of non-co-operation; in action it had not yet gone farther than some ineffective clashes with the Moderate leaders at the annual Congress assembly behind the veil of secrecy of the 'Subjects Committee.' Sri Aurobindo per-

* It may be observed that Sri Aurobindo's education in England gave him a wide introduction to the culture of ancient, of mediaeval and of modern Europe. He was a brilliant scholar in Greek and Latin. He had learned French from his childhood in Manchester and studied for himself German and Italian sufficiently to read Goethe and Dante in the original tongues. (He passed the Tripos in Cambridge in the first division and obtained record marks in Greek and Latin in the examination for the Indian Civil Service.)

suaded its chiefs in Bengal to come forward publicly as an All-India Party with a definite and challenging programme, putting forward Tilak, the popular Maratha leader, at its head, and to attack the then dominant Moderate (Reformist or Liberal) oligarchy of veteran politician and capture from them the Congress and the country. This was the origin of the historic struggle between the Moderates and the Nationalists (called by their opponents Extremists) which in two years changed altogether the face of Indian politics.

"The new-born Nationalist party put forward Swaraj (Independence) as its goal as against the far-off Moderate hope of colonial self-government to be realised at a distant date of a century or two by a slow progress of reform; it proposed as its means of execution a programme which resembled in spirit, though not in its details, the policy of Sinn Fein developed some years later and carried to a successful issue in Ireland. The principle of this new policy was selfhelp; it aimed on one side at an effective organization of the forces of the nation and on the other professed a complete non-co-operation with the fostering of Swadeshi industries to replace them, boycott of British Law Courts and the foundation of a system of Arbitration Courts in their stead, boycott of Government universities and colleges and the creation of a network of National colleges and schools, the formation of societies of young men which would do the work of police and defence and, wherever necessary, a policy of passive resistance were among the immediate items of the programme. Sri Aurobindo hoped to capture the Congress and make it the directing centre of an organised national action, an informal State within the State, which would carry on the struggle for freedom till it was won. He persuaded the party to take up and finance as its recognised organ the newly-founded daily paper, *Bande Mataram*, of which he was at the time acting editor. The *Bande*

Mataram, whose policy from the beginning of 1907 till its abrupt winding-up in 1908 when Aurobindo was in prison was wholly directed by him, circulated almost immediately all over India. During its brief but momentou existence it changed the political thought of India which has ever since preserved fundamentally, even amidst its later developments, the stamp then imparted to it. But the struggle initiated on these lines, though vehement and eventful and full of importance for the future did not last long at the time; for the country was still unripe for so bold a programme.

"Sri Aurobindo was prosecuted for sedition in 1907 and acquitted. Up till now an organiser and writer, he was obliged by this event and by the imprisonment or disappearance of other leaders to come forward as the acknowledged head of the party in Bengal and to appear on the platform for the first time as a speaker. He presided over the Nationalist Conference at Surt in 1907 where in the forceful clash of two equal parties the Congress was broken to pieces. In May, 1908, he was arrested in the Alipur Conspiracy Case as implicated in the doings of the revolutionary group led by his brother Barindra but no evidence of any value could be established agains him and in this case too he was acquitted. After a detention of one year as undertrial prisoner in the Alipur Jail he came out in May 1909, to find the party organisatio broken, its leaders scattered by imprisonment, deportation or self-imposed exile and the party itself still existent but dumb and dispirited and incapable of any strenuous action. For almost a year he strove single-hande as the sole remaining leader of the Nationalists in Indi to revive the movement. He published at this time to ai his effort a weekly English paper, the *Karmayogin,* an a Bengali weekly, the *Dharma.* But at last he was compelled to recognise that the nation was not yet sufficientl trained to carry out his policy and programme. For a tim e thou ed world is not a mistake or a vanity and illusion t roug ast aside by the soul returning to heaven or Nirvana, atic t the scene of a spiritual evolution by which out of this atr aterial Inconscience is to be manifested progressively f ne Divine Consciousness in things. Mind is the highest a erm yet reached in the evolution, but it is not the high- n st of which the evolution is capable. There is above it a Supermind or eternal Truth-consciousness which is in its nature the self-aware and self-determining light and power of a Divine Knowledge. Mind is an ignorance seeking after Truth, but this is a self-existent Knowledge harmoniously manifesting the play of its forms and forces. It is only by the descent of this supermind that the perfection dreamed of by all that is highest in humanity can come. It is possible by opening to a greater divine in nsciousness to rise to this power of light and bliss, dis- the er one's true self, remain in constant union with the victi ne and bring down the supramental Force for the cutta ormation of mind and life and body. To realise faile ossibility has been the dynamic aim of Sri Auro- tio o's Yoga."

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